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Tantawi, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8



Heritage defended

MRS SUZANNE Mubarak, responding to a joint invitation from *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the Fulbright Foundation and the Mubarak Public Library, has agreed to inaugurate a seminar on preserving Egypt's architectural heritage. The seminar, which is to be held in the near future at the Mubarak Library and hosted by its board chairman, Ambassador Abdel-Raouf El-Reedi, will focus on Egypt's 19th and early 20th century architectural heritage, and will be attended by a host of concerned public figures and government officials.

The idea for the seminar, and for the series of round-table discussions on the same topic which are planned to follow it, originated with *Al-Ahram Weekly's* campaigns against the random destruction of the country's architectural wealth, the latest of which was a four-page special supplement on Garden City.

Wrong attacks

OSAMA El-Baz, top political advisor to President Hosni Mubarak, this week described as "wrong and unfair" attacks in the Egyptian and Arab press on US President Bill Clinton's new administration team, portraying them as diehard pro-Israelis.

Speaking in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, El-Baz said that "the image spread in the Middle East about the incoming Clinton administration team is, in my opinion, wrong and unfair." He added, "It is based on misinformation. For instance, there's been a spate of articles in the Arab press on Madeleine Albright and Secretary of Defence designate William Cohen which are totally unfounded."

(full text of interview, p. 3)

Bad letters

ALLEGATIONS that eight letter bombs sent to the US were posted in Egypt are being investigated by Egyptian officials and the FBI, reports **Jailan Halawi**. The letter bombs, disguised as Christmas cards, were received in three different locations in the United States last Thursday, prompting the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to warn Americans to be on the alert for suspicious packages.

According to an FBI statement, all the cards were sent through the mail from Egypt. Some of them were postmarked Alexandria, Egypt, 21 December, but did not list a return address. However, Edward Walker, the US ambassador to Egypt, denied reports that an FBI team would be sent to Egypt to investigate the matter.

Osama El-Baz, political adviser to President Hosni Mubarak commented: "Cairo is investigating the matter and there's no need to indulge in speculation."

According to Minister of Interior Hassan El-Alfi, Egyptian investigators are working on the case and would announce their findings as soon as possible. He was, he said, convinced that none of the militant groups in Egypt were capable of carrying out such operations.

INSIDE



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Workers dig the channel that will eventually allow one million feddans of desert to be brought under cultivation

Opening up new channels

In Upper Egypt to inaugurate the biggest irrigation project in Egypt's history, President Mubarak also held talks with Jordan's King Hussein. **Nevine Khalil** reports from Aswan

President Hosni Mubarak, speaking at a joint press conference with Jordan's King Hussein yesterday in Aswan, addressed "a message" to the Arab states in which he asserted that "the time has come for the establishment of an Arab common market".

Mubarak's appeal, which followed 90-minutes of talks with King Hussein, came on the eve of today's inauguration of a multi-billion dollar project to pump Nile water from Lake Nasser and channel it hundreds of kilometres through the Western Desert to the outreaches of Dakhla and Kharga oases.

"Egypt's project for the 21st century," as Mubarak has described it, will take 25 years to complete and aims at reclaiming one million feddans of desert land, creating a sprawling new network of agricultural and industrial communities outside the confines of the Nile Valley. At its conclusion, officials say, Egyptians will be living on some 30 per cent of their territory, as opposed to the four per cent to which they have been confined for millennia.

The first phase of the project has been financed by Arab and local funding, but official sources say the government expects to attract substantial foreign investment and funding for subsequent phases.

During his inauguration of the project, which also marks the 36th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of the Aswan High Dam, the president will deliver "an address to the world", relayed to some 100 representatives of the foreign and Egyptian press, in which he is expected to outline a long term plan for Egypt's economic development.

In his joint press conference with Hussein, Mubarak deplored the fact that inter-Arab trade accounts for a mere eight per cent of total Arab trade. "There must be an Arab economic bloc in the service of all Arab states without exception. I am not calling for [Arab] economic cooperation in Egypt's interests, but in the interests of all the Arab countries," Mubarak said.

The main focus of Mubarak and Hussein's talks, however, was the stalled Middle East peace process. The two leaders asserted their confidence that the march of Arab-Israeli peace will ultimately transcend all obstacles, but warned that the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu could push the process back to point zero.

Asked to comment on statements by Netanyahu in which he declared Jerusalem non-negotiable, rejected a Palestinian state and asserted that settlement activity will continue in the Palestinian territories, King Hussein said: "If this is accurate, then it is totally rejected. We are not working for the sake of the moment... but in the interest of all peoples."

For Mubarak, Netanyahu's statements implied a "striking against the very foundations [of the peace process] established by Madrid and Oslo. It means beginning from point zero."

Mubarak urged dialogue. "There is space for dialogue. An accommodation could be reached. But to say 'no dialogue on Jerusalem' is to shut the doors against hope."

The issue of Jerusalem, together with other issues related to the final status negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, can only be properly addressed once Israeli withdrawal from Hebron is completed and other commitments under the Oslo accord implemented. . "Then," Mubarak said, "nerves will have calmed, and [final status] negotiations can be conducted coolly, with the two parties careful not to allow the peace process to relapse."

In an apparent reply to recent Israeli charges that Cairo was pushing Arafat and Palestinian negotiators to adopt uncompromising positions, Mubarak insisted: "The final decision is in Palestinian, not Egyptian, hands. If Palestinians agree to what is being offered to them by the Israelis today, this is their responsibility. They are not accountable to us."

Mubarak went on to warn that "unless the peace is on the basis of Madrid and the principles of Madrid, I fear for what may happen in the near future. But I hope that we shall not face great obstacles and that peace will prevail."

(see feature on the New Valley Project, p.13)

Grounds for fury

Tarek Hassan reports from Gaza on the tense meeting between Yasser Arafat and Dennis Ross while **Graham Usher**, in Jerusalem, provides the background to Tuesday's failed talks

On Tuesday evening, between 6.15pm and 12.15am, Yasser Arafat's headquarters, overlooking the Mediterranean at Gaza, was the scene of feverish activity. Arafat's office staff overheard Arafat shouting, before storming out of the room in which he was holding a meeting with the US special envoy to the Middle East Dennis Ross. Apparently Arafat, exhausted after several sleepless nights, exploded in fury at Ross's reiteration of Israeli demands and the American envoy's refusal to move an inch towards meeting Palestinian demands.

Staff at the office overheard Arafat accuse Ross of deceit, of bias towards Israel, and of pressuring him to comply with Israeli demands. According to one of Arafat's staff members attending the meeting, Ross, visibly upset by Arafat's outburst responded, saying "I am not a liar".

Arafat stormed out of the meeting and only returned after consultations with his staff. The six-hour meeting, however, ultimately ended in failure, with the Palestinians expressing unhappiness at the contents of the American letter of guarantee, handed personally to Arafat by Ross, while Ross insisted that he would be unable to negotiate anything in the text without first consulting with Washington.

Arafat's objections centred on both the timetabling and extent of Israeli redeployment and withdrawals from the West Bank. Netanyahu had earlier argued that withdrawal from 98 per cent of the area stipulated in the interim agreement should be delayed until the final status negotiations in 1999, rather than being completed, as stipulated in the interim agreement, by September 1997.

At their "secret" rendezvous in Gaza on 5 January, writes **Graham Usher**, Netanyahu told Arafat that he wanted to extend the deadline of the Israeli army's third and final West Bank redeployment from September 1997 to May 1999, the scheduled close of Oslo's final status negotiations on Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and borders. When Arafat heard the proposal, according to one observer, "he nearly fell off his chair". The PLO leader said that without a clear Israeli commitment to the original interim timetable for the redeployments there could be no deal on Hebron. Most Palestinians believe Arafat is right to insist on the linkage.

Under the interim agreement, Israel agreed to make three West Bank redeployments at six monthly intervals, with the first slated to have begun in September 1996. The depth of the first two redeployments is to be negotiated and is likely to be cosmetic. At the 5 January meeting, Netanyahu reportedly told Arafat that he would undertake the first redeployment "within six weeks" of a Hebron deal being struck. But, say Israeli sources, this is unlikely to amount to much more than some parts of the West Bank's Israeli controlled Area C being transferred to the Palestinian Authority's (PA) civilian control, or Area B.

Nor is Netanyahu interested in transforming any of the West Bank's 440 Palestinian villages into "A" areas, in which the PA has both civilian and security jurisdiction. Since Israeli/Palestinian confrontations in September, sources say many Likud ministers, as well as the Israeli army, believe it would be detrimental to Israel's military control to grant the PA police anymore West Bank territory than the three per cent it currently commands.

The PA's real prize is the third redeployment. The interim agreement states that by the end of September 1997 the Israeli army should have withdrawn from everywhere in the West Bank except for Jerusalem, settlements and "specified military locations" — the last three areas to be decided during final status talks. Palestinian and Israeli observers agree that if this were to happen between 70 to 85 per cent of the West Bank would come under PA control.

Such a shift in the balance of power in the West Bank would not only strengthen the PA's hand vis-à-vis critical final status issues but would counter Israeli attempts to "settle" the final map of a future Palestine through its ongoing hold of most of the West Bank. This is why Arafat is now using a deal on Hebron as leverage for an Israeli commitment to a fixed timetable for redeployment. It is also why Netanyahu is trying to evade a timetable.

Netanyahu's game plan is to move swiftly to final status talks, while linking further redeployments to PA compliance with Likud notions of "reciprocity", likely to include a welter of "security" demands placed that the Israeli leader believes Arafat will be unable or unwilling to fulfil: e.g. the "extradition" of 27 "wanted" Palestinians into Israeli custody, the abrogation of the Palestine Covenant and the impounding of all unlicenced weapons in the self rule areas. With the Hebron redeployment completed and the final status negotiations in full swing, no one could then accuse Netanyahu of stalling on the Oslo process. Rather, any impasse in the redeployment would be due to Arafat's failure to meet Israel's "security concerns".

The PA response to Netanyahu's new timetable is one of absolute rejection. "It is an irresponsible proposal," PA negotiator, Hassan Asfour, told Reuters on 7 January. "The agreement specifically states that the last stage of the further redeployments from the West Bank should be completed by 7 September 1997".

Most Palestinians in the Occupied Territories hope this line will be maintained. The reason is self evident. If the PA is to resist Likud's military and settlement ambitions during the rest of Oslo's interim stage, it will need more than an agreement on Hebron or progress to the final status negotiations. It will need a contiguous territory in most of the West Bank.

Final settlement?

YOSSI Beilin, an opposition leader and a key architect of the Oslo Accords, and Knesset member Michael Eitan, of the ruling Likud Party, have drawn up a proposal for a final peace settlement after several months of discreet talks. Their unfinished plan, revealed yesterday by parliamentary officials and reported by AFP, calls for the creation of a demilitarised Palestinian entity. However, the majority of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would remain under Israeli sovereignty, while settlement blocs, which are mostly located around Jerusalem and near the Green Line separating Israel from the West Bank, would be annexed to Israel. Isolated Jewish communities would receive a special status guaranteeing their ties to Israel.

However, there was no agreement on whether the Palestinian entity would be called a state, nor on the thorny issue of the right of return for Palestinians refugees. The future status of the Jordan Valley, where Israel wants to maintain farming settlements on the eastern border with Jordan, was also left unresolved.

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New village for flood victims

THIS week Mrs Suzanne Mubarak inaugurated 'Susan Mubarak Village' in Hager Al-Dab'iya, near Luxor, reports *Rania Khallaf*. Built by the Egyptian Red Crescent Society at a cost of LE8.5 million, provided by *donations*, the village will house people made homeless by the 1994 floods. The village includes 124 houses and a hospital with the latest medical equipment. The hospital, which will serve more than 50,000 people in Hager Al-Dab'iya and the surrounding area, was paid for by a donation from the Al-Fayed family, the famous owners of London's Harrods, said Mamdouh Gabr, secretary-general of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society.

Mrs Mubarak hailed the efforts of young people in Qena Governorate, in cooperation with the Red Crescent, to bring the project to fruition, and expressed the hope that this would be the first in a series of similar achievements to help the victims of natural disasters.

Gabr reported that the Red Crescent has held a series of meetings under the auspices of Mrs Mubarak to decide the best ways to support health and social services in disadvantaged villages, and that three new health units were to be built in the governorates of Assiut, Minya and Sohag.

Mrs Mubarak also inaugurated a one-class school, a youth centre and a children's library in Luxor. According to Maj. Gen. Mohamed Youssef, head of Luxor's city council, the project to redevelop the city — which Mrs Mubarak has adopted — will help to develop human resources, increase tourism and provide *jobs for* more than *16,000* people.



Suleiman faces parliamentary fire

The People's Assembly was the scene of a stormy debate this week over the government's responsibility for construction code violations, reports **Gamal Essam El-Din**

The collapse of the building in Heliopolis, with the loss of 67 lives, continues to cause reverberations in the People's Assembly. *This week the Assembly's Housing Committee submitted a 38-page report to the house on the responsibility of government agencies for the disaster*, and the measures necessary to address loopholes in construction legislation.

Emotions ran high in the Assembly as members of parliament, particularly opposition deputies, held the government responsible for the alarming rise in construction code violations, brought about, *they alleged, by lax law enforcement and corruption*. However, the committee's report emphasised that the increasing number of construction offences over the last few years was not the responsibility of the government alone, but of *all* those involved, especially "those who wanted to accumulate riches at the expense of law enforcement."

As far as the collapse of the Heliopolis building was concerned, the committee laid the blame squarely on the Nasr City municipality and housing department for its failure to demolish three unauthorised floors on the top of the building as well as for allowing the destruction of a pillar and walls on the ground floor.

The report was criticised by deputies, who claimed that it failed to deal with the real causes of the tragedy. They further accused the government of failing to provide proper solutions to end housing violations, and demanded that officials directly or indirectly responsible for such violations should be severely punished.

Responding to 10 information requests and 18 *questions on measures taken by the ministry to put* an end to building offences, Housing Minister Ib*rahim Suleiman blamed the private sector for most violations. "All the apartment buildings which have collapsed over the past few years were built* by the private sector, while offences in public-sector buildings were discovered early enough and *are now being remedied*," Suleiman said. But he stressed that most of those in the private sector building trade were honest people, who had built safe buildings: "*It is just a small group of landlords, who made use of their wealth, accumulated in oil-*rich Gulf countries, to put up substandard buildings, using substandard building materials to make more money at the expense of quality specifications, law enforcement and the lives of citizens."

Suleiman acknowledged, however, that the long absence of a clear-cut policy on enforcing contracting regulations, alongside a maze of bureaucratic procedures, have exacerbated the problem. "Bureaucratic administrative procedures led to private contracting companies committing violations at the expense of safety and quality standards, in an effort to minimise their losses. However, the government has decided to provide a helping hand to these companies *in a serious bid to improve their financial* condition," said Suleiman.

He also added that private sector contracting companies, in their attempt to generate maximum profits, had entrusted inefficient sub-contractors with work on their buildings. "For this reason, all contractors will be closely re-evaluated by the ministry to ensure that they are complying with building procedures." He also drew attention to Law 106 for 1996 on construction regulations, which clarified the responsibility of engineering consultancy offices in *designing building specifications to legal* standards and ensuring that these standards were complied with in the construction phase.

Many deputies taking the floor were in no doubt that the government was to blame for violations. Ahmed Abu Higgi, deputy for Sohag, criticised a military order issued by Prime Minister Kamal El-*Ganzouri immediately following the building col*lapse *in Heliopolis. He claimed* that this order had *only served* to aggravate bureaucratic procedures because it made obtaining a building licence even more complicated.

And Farouq Oqbi, member for Hawamdiya in Giza Governorate, railed against the acceptance of corruption in society. "A finance minister in Japan committed suicide after he was accused of bribery," he said. "He had not even been charged, but he killed himself because he could not live with the accusation. Egypt is very dear to us, and those who offend it should be struck with an iron hand."

In response, Agriculture Minister Youssef Wali replied that "every government official is answerable for his actions, and the government is firmly *opposed to any deviations from the law*." Wali also said that the military order had been necessary to stop building on agricultural land.

In the view of Mohamed Khalil Qouita, deputy for Faraskour in Daqahliya Governorate, "stiffening penalties for corruption is the real road to real reform." He called on the government "to seize this occasion to purge the country of all bribery and corruption."

But Rafaat Seif, a leftist deputy for Aga, also in *Daqahliya Governorate, accused the government of favouritism, enforcing the law only in cases in*volving "poor and simple people," while the rich and powerful remained above the law.

He accused the Assembly's housing committee of ignoring a report prepared by a technical committee formed by the governor of Cairo to investigate the reasons behind the collapse of the *Heliopolis apartment building. "The reason is that* this 40-page report held an engineering consultancy office, which is owned by the sons of two ministers, responsible for the removal of a pillar in the ground-floor *flat* owned by the Federation of Egyptian Banks," said Seif.

Zakaria Azmi, chief of the presidential staff, supported Seif, and demanded that the housing minister "reveal the truth."

"We must admit that there is corruption in government circles, even though it is a National Democratic Party government. This is a disaster and we desperately need to know who was responsible for it," Azmi said. He also demanded *that the housing minister entrust the ministry's* Construction Research Centre with the task of *checking the condition of all buildings built by* the ministry.

But Minister Suleiman refused to concede that powerful and wealthy people were allowed to act outside the law. "I have read the 40-page report prepared by the governor of Cairo on the Heliopolis building very carefully and I'm certain that no privileges have been given to the powerful," he said.

Radioactivity in the Delta?

A study purporting to show that Israel carried out nuclear tests, possibly in the Negev Desert and the Gulf of Aqaba, was described as unscientific by the chief of the Atomic Energy Authority. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

The findings of a four-year study by Tanta University physicists, who discovered what they described as high levels of radioactive substances in soil samples, have been rejected by Hesham Fouad, chief of the Atomic Energy Authority. The study *said that the high levels of radioactivity could be the* result of nuclear bomb tests carried out by Israel, but Fouad insisted that radiation levels registered by monitoring stations nationwide were normal.

According to the study, a sample of crops was collected from fields near Nil Al-Huwiyshaat village in the Delta during December, January and *February 1995-96* and analysed by laboratory scientists. "We found a higher than normal percentage of cobalt 60 in the foodstuffs that we examined. This element is a radioisotope which results from man-made activity; it can only exist as the result of a nuclear explosion," physicist Tarek El-Nimr, who led the study, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

He believes that the high levels of cobalt 60 are the result of nuclear testing rather than nuclear dumping because radioactive levels were found to be normal in water, thus showing that the contamination of the foodstuffs had occurred through the soil. But for Fouad, the conclusions reached by the study are "unscientific".

"There is no scientific evidence that nuclear tests were carried out in the region recently," Fouad said. "Monitoring stations did not register any increase in radiation levels. Analysis of water and soil samples also show that radiation levels are normal."

According to Fouad, a nationwide survey was conducted as recently as last September "but it did not record any extraordinary levels of radiation." But, Fouad added, the possibility of a leakage from the ageing Dimona reactor could not be ruled out "as long as Israel does not place its nuclear facilities under the inspection of the International Atomic Energy Agency."

Another physicist, Mohamed Mustafa of the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority, believes that Israel has carried out a series of *underground nu*clear tests in the Negev Desert. The first test, he said, was made in an 800m-deep hole in the Negev in 1966, and a joint test with South Africa was carried out in September 1979.

El-Nimr believes that what he considers as a high percentage of radiation in the Gulf of Aqaba is indicative of the fact that nuclear explosive testing of a particular type is being carried out underwater. "The best environment to carry out the tests of the cobalt bomb is underwater because the water absorbs the strong vibrations which result from the explosion," he explained.

"Some countries which carry out nuclear tests cover up their actions by linking the timing of their explosions to the earthquake measuring system. The test is carried out shortly after an earthquake is reported," he said. The tests themselves cause seismic disturbance, *he added*, which sparks off an earthquake which is presumed to be an aftershock.

The full dangers inherent in Israel's nuclear capability were spelled out in a recent report. "As long as deterrence works to maintain stability, the balance of terror can be justified," wrote *Elizabeth* Steven, an expert on nuclear weapons. "But there is no balance when only one of the actors possesses nuclear weapons. Israel made it clear that it intends *to be the sole nuclear power in the region when it* bombed Iraq's Osiraq reactor in 1981.

"It must be kept in mind that these weapons are more than just explosive; their radioactive fallout makes it almost impossible to execute a surgical strike on a military target."

Steven told the *Weekly* that if Israel were to hit a non-military target with a nuclear warhead, the mere selection of that instrument, with its concomitant ability to yield immense damage, would mean that the damage inflicted was one of Israel's objectives.

Israel follows what one *Egyptian* expert described as an opaque nuclear policy. Secrecy, according to Atef Elian, a professor of physics at Ain Shams University's Faculty of Science, is crucial to such a strategy.

Another American expert on Middle Eastern affairs said that *one reason it is* so difficult to assess the foundation on which Israel's nuclear policy is based is that the Israeli government itself has never clearly formulated or evaluated a policy.

"Israeli policy is based on ad hoc solutions. From the beginning, when it decided to go nuclear, Israel's leaders have been influenced by the holocaust syndrome," *said the expert*. "Israel seeks to preserve more than just its population. Its *moral justification for its nuclear weapons arsenal* is that a whole society and culture is at stake."

An Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman said Israel had flouted international law to acquire its nuclear arsenal, resorting to illegally obtaining fissile materials from the US and heavy water from Norway.

"Israel has consistently denied its nuclear ambitions and has deceived its allies as well as its own people," he added. "Years of subterfuge have enabled it to effectively evade the moral questioning that the existence of its nuclear weapons programme demands."

Nasserist old-guard firmly in the saddle

Its rebellious "middle generation" out of the picture, the Nasserist party held a subdued conference this week, which as **Khaled Dawoud** reports, affirmed the *leadership of the Nasserist old-guard*

The Democratic Arab Nasserist Party (DANP) ended its second two-day national conference on Sunday with a unanimous approval of the re-election of the party's secretary-general, Diaeddin Dawoud, for another four years.

The decision to re-elect Dawoud followed one of the deepest splits within the party since its establishment in 1992. Last year, four members of the party's highest ranking body, the Politburo, resigned in protest at what they saw as Dawoud's undemocratic style of running the party.

Amin Eskander, spokesman of the resigning members — who belongs to the so-called "middle generation" of Nasserists who, unlike Dawoud's generation which holds the reins of power in the DANP, were students at the time of Nasser's death and occupied no official posts in his regime — said they would soon present a request to the Parties Committee to form another Nasserist party.

But Dawoud, in his speech to the conference held at Nasr City's Conference Hall, said that he doubted that the split would weaken his party. Such events, he said, were normal in the early stages of a party's life.

Instead, he turned his guns against the government, strongly criticising it for limiting the activities of opposition parties. Publishing weekly newspapers, Dawoud said, did not on its own provide the opposition parties with sufficient freedom of action or access to the public. The Nasserist leader demanded opposition time on government run radio and television.

Dawoud acknowledged that the radical changes *in the world and regional situations that followed* the end of the Cold War have faced Nasserist ideology with "a dilemma". There was, he said, a need to redefine Nasserism, "but within the context of immutable principles, such as maintaining Egypt's independence, a bias towards the poor and a commitment to social justice."

Dawoud added that the struggle to regain the rights of the Palestinian people and establish an independent Palestinian *state*, end Israeli occupation of all Arab territories and direct efforts towards achieving Arab unity and an Arab common market were all indispensable cornerstones of Nasserist ideology.

He called on all Arab parties to intensify their activities to confront attempts to normalise relations with Israel, particularly in the light of the election of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

The DANP's final statement, issued at the end of the two-day conference, also reiterated the party's opposition to the privatisation of the public sector, which the party considers a basic foundation of state and society in Egypt.

On the organisational level, the conference's most *important decision was to accept the resignation of* Mahmoud El-Maraghi, editor-in-chief of the party's weekly newspaper, *Al-Arabi*. El-Maraghi was the first editor of the newspaper, which was established in 1993. Abdallah Imam, a prominent Nasserist figure, was appointed in El-Maraghi's place.

The conference, which was attended by delegates of Nasserist parties from Yemen, Syria and Lebanon, established a "coordination committee" of Arab Nasserists parties, headed by Dawoud.

A statement issued by the DANP and four other Arab Nasserist parties, including two from Lebanon, said the committee would be open "to all active Nasserist organisations in the Arab world, and will coop*erate with all nationalist and Islamic forces who are* seeking freedom for the Arab nation. It will reject all forms of dependency and seek the unity of the [Arab] nation, its independent development and the establishment of social justice and true democracy."

The readiness to cooperate with Islamist parties is a turning point in the history of Nasserist ideology, as the party has traditionally maintained an animosity towards political Islamic groups. But although *a wide section of Egypt's Nasserists* support the new orientation towards alliance with the Islamists, it remains a controversial issue within their ranks. Debate on this question was carefully avoided during the conference, and it received no mention in the conference's final statement.

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Obituary

Statesman beyond rank

Soldier, strategist and diplomat, Hafez Ismail was entrusted with sensitive tasks at crucial junctures of Egypt's recent history. **Aziza Sami** *reviews his life*

Hafez Ismail, *who died on 1 January at the age of 77*, was, and remained, a military man par excellence. His work in the diplomatic sphere, entrusted with sensitive foreign policy assignments by presidents Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Anwar *El-Sadat, seemed to embody a reversal of Clausewitz's axiom that* "war is but the continuation of politics by other means."

Ismail was fastidious, discreet, and averse to political meandering, qualities which led to him being assigned to negotiate with the two superpowers, at the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, and during its waning a decade later.

Born in 1919, Ismail was deeply influenced by his army *officer father, and decided to follow in his footsteps*. He graduated from the Egyptian Military Academy in 1935, and from Sandhurst, the British military academy, in 1937.

He fought in the Palestine War in 1948, and served for a year as assistant military attaché at the Egyptian Embassy in Washington in 1951 before returning to Egypt at the onset of the 1952 Revolution to head the Bureau of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, responsible for organising the army's high command. It was a sensitive position which he held for seven and a half years.

In the mid-fifties, Ismail headed the first delegation to contract an arms deal with the Soviet bloc, heralding the beginning of Egypt's orientation towards the Soviet Union in response to Israel's expanding army and the increasing American and Western presence in the Middle East.

He headed three delegations during 1955 and 1956 to Prague, Warsaw and Moscow, and negotiated the $40 million arms deal which signalled the major restructuring of the Egyptian army between 1956 and 1960.

The '60s saw the introduction of a new dimension to Ismail's career, as he began a 10-year stint in diplomacy as an undersecretary at the Foreign Ministry. But he returned to the military in 1970 when Nasser appointed him head of General Intelligence.

With Nasser's death in September, the late President Sadat appointed *Ismail* to the crucial position of national security adviser. At a period of rising tension between Sadat and the Soviets, Ismail was delegated to negotiate the *financial terms* of a stalled arms deal with Moscow, while simultaneously negotiating with the US to solicit a more positive American role in resolving the Middle East conflict. Appointed ambassador to Moscow in 1974, he witnessed the decline of *Egyptian*-Soviet relations.

In his memoirs *Egypt's National Security in an Era of Challenges*, published *in* 1987, he *put forward the view that it* may have been a mistake on Sadat's part to reach an impasse with the Russians in 1972 due, among other things, to their refusal to supply the air force with advanced bombers, "because, in the end, the army's effectiveness could not be measured by a single weapon."

His last diplomatic assignment was as ambassador to Paris in 1977.

If his life reads like a foreign policy history of contemporary Egypt, the shifts in Ismail's military and political career did not seem to imply any contradiction for him. He took them on with the typical equilibrium of a man whose priority was to get the task at hand done well. He once pointed to an interesting paradox in his diplomatic experience. Though diplomacy, unlike war, he said, affords the alternatives of compromise, his postings in Europe — London in 1964, and France in 1968 and 1977 — never really afforded him room for third solutions.

Ismail's own opinions were never easy to ascertain and the scope for giving independent council on foreign policy matters was minimal, but reading between the lines, most analysts of the period believed that he leaned more towards Nasser.

The most he would say in assessment of the two eras was that when Sadat made his historic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, thus breaking radically from the policies of *the Nasserist era*, "I felt it my duty to adopt a balanced attitude, and weigh the pros and cons." Nevertheless, he felt that "the last card had been thrown, leaving *no more room* for leverage, and the stage was set for a new strategic reality in the region."

His last diplomatic position as ambassador to France marked the completion of a cycle for him, the termination of *an era with which he* had been all too familiar. He did not seem to be optimistic in an age where the defining principals of the Cold War have disappeared, *and the alternatives* afforded by strategic balance no longer exist.

In a 'new world order' where there was no competing superpower to vie with the United States, whose interest continued to lie predominantly with Israel, Ismail saw *negative implications* for the Middle East.

Without an official post for the last 16 years of his life, he eased into retirement with *equanimity, just as he* had eased out of his military uniform and into the world of diplomacy.

He spent time collecting newspaper *clippings*, perusing studies on strategic politics and the use of military policy to realise political objectives. He restricted his socialising and would spend hours at a solitary game of chess.

But there was none of the decrepitude of advanced age. He maintained his meticulous appearance till the end, a tall, well-built man, whose features the French archaeologist *Madame de Noble* Cour once described as "typically Pharaonic".

Ismail, who died after a *brief illness*, is survived by his wife, a daughter, Leila, a son, Amr, and three grandchildren.

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Continuity or change?


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Top political presidential adviser Osama El-Baz outlined in an exclusive interview the parameters of Egypt's regional and international role. He spoke to **Gamal Nkrumah**

Osama El-Baz, chief of the President's Bureau for Political Affairs, is hopeful that much will be achieved in 1997. He pulls no punches when it comes to defending the interests of Egypt, the Arab world and the developing countries in the international arena. 1997 might not turn out to be the year of radical changes, but it seems destined to become the year in which last minute preparations for long-awaited transformations in the region's political map will be made.

El-Baz is optimistic. He believes that, notwithstanding this week's violent setbacks in the West Bank, progress on the Palestinian track will be made. Moreover, El-Baz expects progress to be made on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts in spite of the year's bumpy start with a bomb ripping through a bus in Damascus over the weekend.

El-Baz dismisses the criticisms of United States President Bill Clinton's new administration team now prevalent in the Arab world. In his view, those who are fearful are ignorant and misinformed. He decried the widespread notion that the officials of the new Clinton administration are pro-Israeli. He warned against the character assassination of certain US officials found in the Arab press. El-Baz believes that the very same officials who are criticised now are going to prove to be the most ardent supporters of the peace process in the Middle East.

Delays in the Middle East peace process became common in the latter half of 1996. Islamic Jihad, the militant Islamist Palestinian group, has called the PLO's deal with the Israelis over Hebron an "Agreement of Shame." Should we look forward to agreements that we can be proud of in 1997?

Significant progress has been made in the past few days. In 1996, negotiations dragged for months. President Hosni Mubarak has made it a point to warn all the parties concerned of the dangers of procrastination. Valuable time is being wasted. Delays can only hurt the peace process. Delays erode the people's confidence in the peace process. Israeli intransigence sheds dim light on the peace process. Meaningful progress, though, has been made in the past two weeks.

The only remaining hurdle is the Israeli refusal to set a date for completion of the re-deployments from areas B and C of the West Bank. Palestinians are insisting on this date. They fear unforseeable developments which would prompt an Israeli reluctance to complete the withdrawal from these areas, especially Area C. Our own view is that it shouldn't be difficult for the Israeli side to honour its commitment to complete its withdrawal from the West Bank by 7 September 1997.

At the moment, the American Coordinator Dennis Ross is meeting with Arafat to iron out differences over this point. Certain less important remaining points, such as providing for a certain form of official Palestinian presence in Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi, the Tomb of the Patriarchs. But this is a relatively easy problem to resolve.

We hope that the two sides will reach an agreement and sign the protocol and the agreed-upon minutes. This will usher in a new era and open a new chapter in the peace process. The new Israeli government is committing itself irreversibly to the Oslo Accords. It also has reconciled itself to the necessity of conceding the right of the Palestinian people to control their own destiny and to exercise the right of self-determination within the coming few years.

We certainly hope that final status negotiations will be held without delay and that the parties will reach agreement over sensitive issues such as Jerusalem, the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the refugees and the borders between Israel and the Palestinian state. But there is no doubt that the time has come for reaching a comprehensive agreement that will end the Palestinian-Israeli dispute once and for all. It is high time that we establish a mutually agreed-upon formula for peaceful coexistence between neighbours.

Parallel to moves for resolving problems on the Palestinian-Israeli track, there must be meaningful progress on the two remaining tracks, the Syrian and the Lebanese. Reaching an agreement on the Palestinian track doesn't belittle the importance of the other two tracks — overall commitment is to work for a comprehensive settlement for the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Only after reaching agreement on the West Bank and Gaza, the Syrian Golan and Lebanon will the Arab-Israeli dispute come to an end. Then it will give way to an era of reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

Last month, you embarked on a trip to the US. What were the main topics under discussion?

During my latest US trip, I mainly focused on issues pertaining to the Middle East peace process and other problems concerning the region. The focus was on American policy toward these problems in years to come.

I met with Secretary of State designate Madeleine Albright; US President Bill Clinton's adviser on national security, Anthony Lake; Undersecretary of State Robert Pelletreau; the Middle East Peace Process Coordinator Dennis Ross and other senior American officials. We devoted most of our time and energies to discussing matters relating to the Middle East. I gathered from these meetings that the Clinton administration is aware of the importance of playing an active role in the Middle East. The officials I met all have a keen interest in Middle Eastern affairs. It was equally clear that the administration is quite pleased with the Egyptian role in the peace process and looks forward to continued US-Egyptian co-operation.

Of course that doesn't mean that Egypt and America have identical views. But it is important to realise that America is a superpower and the leading Western nation. Egypt is an Arab state with a certain national responsibility. Egypt is the peace initiator, peace-keeper and the country that can best preserve regional security.

But a lack of agreement on certain issues doesn't mean that we are in conflict with the US or that we can't cooperate with the US. In fact, I would like to emphasise that US-Egyptian relations can be characterised as very friendly and warm.

Is the issue of sanctions against Libya and Iraq not among the subjects on which Egypt and America adopt different views?

There's a feeling in the Middle East and the Islamic world, as well as in the Third World in general, that the new world order has meant applying double standards while dealing with sensitive issues. For instance, many people in the Third World feel that the new world order didn't deal fairly with the Bosnian crisis, or with the tragedies in Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire. These tragic situations were not dealt with in the same degree of decisiveness and alertness that was demonstrated vis-à-vis Iraq or Libya. Of course, we know that these situations are not analogous. Each situation is different in its susceptibility of being influenced by outside intervention.

Some people believe, with good reason, that the international community should try to re-examine such issues as the United Nations sanctions system, the dimensions and the consequences of the concept of globalisation and the nature of relations between the North and South at a time when the gap is widening between the developed and the developing worlds.

We hope that this gap will be narrowed progressively if we are to move to the era of the global village. However, disparities between the haves and the have-nots, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak are very wide. We believe that these problems should be addressed seriously and objectively, free from a spirit of confrontation and sensationalism.

This brings us to the question of the North-South divide in a world that is increasingly becoming a global village. What is Egypt's role in this village?

At the meeting of the G15 [the leading nations of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)] in the Zimbabwean capital Harare, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe delivered a very thoughtful and well-studied critique of the concept of globalisation as it is understood and applied by Western governments.

Here again, our aim isn't to confront the nations of the North or to create international tension or friction. We want to establish an equitable system in which the interests of both sides are preserved. The remarks delivered by President Mugabe reflected the consensus of NAM. We believe it is high time for the two sides to enter into dialogue for addressing this subject in an objective and open-minded manner.

Our starting point could be that all countries have a real interest in building and maintaining equitable relations. The poor and underdeveloped have a right to build their own industries, increase their agricultural production and improve their chances of absorbing modern technology. The South must also be given a chance to improve the quality of life of its people in such areas as housing and education, as well as to raise health and medical care standards.

It is unfair to require countries in the early or initial phases of economic development to submit to the norms of the industrially advanced countries. We cannot force the developing world to adopt Western standards and value systems. The countries of the South must proceed to improve their production, combat unemployment — the most serious socio-economic problem in the Third World — and modernise and upgrade social services.

What was your impression of Clinton's new cabinet members?

The image spread in the Middle East about the incoming Clinton administration team is, in my opinion, wrong and unfair. It is based on misinformation. For instance, there's been a spate of articles in the Arab press on Madeleine Albright and Secretary of Defence William Cohen which are totally unfounded. Ms Albright is not Jewish and never had any Jewish connections. Of course, being a Jew in itself is of no significance. One must not judge people by their religion. One is not biased against Arabs on account of one's religious identification.

Albright was born a Roman Catholic and is now a Protestant Christian. From our observation of her conduct and from direct contact over the past several years, one gets the clear impression that she is a fair-minded, open-minded and objective person with almost no bias towards or against anyone.

It will be a grave mistake to characterise her as anti-Arab or anti-Egyptian. On several occasions, she has expressed her belief that the US should make an effort to strengthen cooperation with Arab nations and she demonstrated a genuine respect for Arab culture. She considers herself a good friend of Egypt and values the role of Egypt and the contribution of its leader, President Mubarak, to the cause of peace, stability and prosperity in the Middle East.

Albright respects the Egyptian cultural heritage and I've never sensed any bias in her attitude towards Egypt or other Arabs. The US decision to block the extension of a second term for the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali cannot be attributed to Albright. A decision of this nature cannot be taken except as a result of consensus in the various departments concerned and at the highest level. It is unfair to blame Ms Albright for it.

And retired republican Senator William Cohen?

As for Senator William Cohen, people assume from his name that he is a Jew, which he is not. Although his father was a Jew, his mother was Christian. His father died when William Cohen was only ten years old. Cohen is a Protestant Christian. Again, like Albright, he's fair-minded and objective. He is a very hard-working and diligent person.

I've dealt with him over the past few years when he was a prominent senator from Maine. He exhibited an exceptional ability to look into matters in an objective manner. Also, he is not given to succumbing to pressure from lobbies. He makes up his mind independently. He was an active member of the US Council on Foreign Relations, which, as you know, is a very prestigious organisation.

The new secretary of defence is a friend of Egypt. President Mubarak thinks very highly of him and considers him an asset to the new Clinton team. We're looking forward to dealing with both of them and with the new National Security Adviser Samuel Berger who is a moderate and fair-minded person. Berger happens to be Jewish, but his religious orientation doesn't colour his views or alter his commitment to the Middle East peace process. He was an active member of the Peace Now movement which supports the Palestinian right to self-determination and urges Israelis to look at Arabs with full respect, free of any feeling of superiority. Berger is hard-working and he investigates all the subjects he deals with thoroughly.

Mr Anthony Lake, the new Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director, is a man who combines the intellectual depth of the academician with the vast experience of someone who has dealt with US national security issues for years. In short, the new Clinton administration team is a very promising one and there is no reason whatsoever for people in this region to look upon it with apprehension or suspicion.

One should base his or her analysis and expectations on real fact and information rather than on rumours and misinformation. Additionally, religious orientation shouldn't be a factor in evaluating the character of any official. There are Christians who are more pro-Israeli than Jewish people. I have come across many Jewish officials in the US, Europe and Israel itself who hold objective and humanistic views and who don't hesitate to attack extremist Israeli policies.


photo: Emad Abdel-Hadi

UN lessons

Democratisation is as necessary on the global level as it is within nation-states, insisted former UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali, as he assessed his five years at the helm of the world organisation in a round-table discussion held at Al-Ahram this week. **Khaled Dawoud** attended

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, making his first public address since leaving his post as UN secretary-general, told a round-table discussion hosted by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies that his five-year experience in the world organisation had strengthened his belief that democracy was necessary not only within nation states, but among the international community as a whole.

His term, which began at the end of the Cold War, began with the production of an 'Agenda for Peace', a result of a year's continuous work in consultation with a group of experts. This was followed by an 'Agenda for Development'.

His last document, which he considers the most important, was the 'Agenda for Democratisation', approved by the UN General Assembly only 11 days before he left his post. While insisting that he was not happy with the document because "it needs more thought," Ghali said it was an important piece of work because its subject matter was how to fulfil the UN goals of peace, development and democracy.

"Democracy should not only be within each nation, but among states as well. In this agenda, I call for the democratisation of international relations," Ghali said. He added that many world problems could no longer be solved on the national level. "So if we don't have democracy on the international level, there will be contradictions, because a decision will be taken by one country alone, and the [world] system will become totalitarian."

Problems such as the environment, terrorism, drugs, international conflicts, epidemics and economic development are all issues which can no longer be solved on the national level and need the cooperation of the international community, he said.

The former UN chief said that his second contribution to the United Nations had been the institution of a series of international conferences on global issues: the environment, human rights, population, development, women and finally the conference on urbanisation.

Ghali said that he had also paid special attention to what he labelled as "orphan conflicts", ones which are ignored or forgotten by the world. They include civil conflicts in Africa, and the struggles of indigenous populations, women and children. The UN, under Ghali, managed to solve some long-lasting conflicts such as those in Cambodia, Salvador and Guatemala. On the other hand, it failed to settle hostilities in Bosnia, Somalia and Afghanistan. "The key point is that if there is a political will among the parties to settle their conflict, we succeed," said Ghali. "But we cannot, as the United Nations, impose a settlement."

Ghali divided his five years at the UN into three phases. During the first phase, covering the last year of former US President George Bush's term in the White House and the first year of Bill Clinton's term in 1992, he had the full support of the world's nations. During this phase, the Security Council held its first ever meeting on a summit level, with the presence of the heads of state of all Security Council members, and approved Ghali's Agenda for Peace. "This was the period of success, satisfaction and support," he said.

But the change, or the second phase, occurred after the UN's involvement in Somalia and the killing of 18 US soldiers there, including one whose body was pulled through the streets of Mogadishu, a brutal scene shown by television stations throughout the world. This was followed by the Republican Party gaining control over the US Congress and Senate under the leadership of Bob Dole. Dole took to attacking the UN, aiming his attack at Ghali himself. He labelled the secretary-general "General Ghali", who, he said, wanted to rule the world with UN troops.

The third phase in Ghali's term, he said, began when the United States realised that it was the only world power. "The Americans do not need diplomacy, and they found out that the UN could limit their control. My opinion is that if the United States wants democracy on the international level, they should encourage other countries to participate in decision-making."

This view did not satisfy the US, particularly in the period leading up to the presidential election. Ghali believes that one of his mistakes was spending a lot of time and energy trying to involve other countries in world affairs, visiting the Japanese, the German and Russian parliaments, meanwhile neglecting the US Congress, which he visited only twice during his five-year term.

At any rate, according to Ghali, it became clear that "the US leadership decided that it needed a new UN secretary-general who was not independent." Ghali predicted that this situation will continue for the next 10 or 20 years.

He also suggested that international decisions may in future be made under the auspices of other organisations, such as NATO or the World Trade Organisation.

Ghali believes that his desire to finalise the oil-for-food deal with Iraq and his report on the Israeli bombing of the Qana refugee camp may have been other contributory factors to US opposition to his nomination for a second term.

His struggle to nominate himself for another term, gaining the support of all the Security Council members except the United States, had been undertaken to emphasise the importance of maintaining the independence of the secretary-general and the UN, Ghali said.

Ghali also vehemently denied that he had given any promises to Washington that he would only seek a single term at the time of his election in 1991.

Despite all his disappointments, Ghali insisted that the UN continued to have an important role to play as an international forum where global problems could be discussed and solved. "There is a consensus on the importance of the United Nations, and the proof of that lies in the strong competition over the top posts in its different bodies," he said. Decision making, however, would remain in the hands of the world superpowers, particularly when it comes to solving international conflicts, because only they have the money and the troops on the ground, Ghali added.

His time as UN chief behind him, Ghali said he is shortly to publish a book entitled *The Egyptian Road to Jerusalem*, on the peace talks between Egypt and Israel. He also plans to produce a second book on his experience in the United Nations, but has not settled yet on whether it should be an academic work, or a narrative of his years as UN chief, including information on secret negotiations he was involved in, with the aim of solving international conflicts.

He would, he said, always be concerned with issues of relations between the South and the North.

French President Jacques Chirac has offered Ghali the post of secretary-general of a new organisation for French-speaking countries which will hold its inaugural meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam next November. But he has yet to make a decision on whether to accept the post. "I still need time to think," he said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



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Israeli policewomen patrol in the centre of Hebron, where the presence of 400 Jewish settlers has so far stalled the implementation of the Oslo Accords in the city (photo: AFP)

Hebron as a stepping stone

The US is putting pressure on the Palestinians to accept a deal on Hebron that could become the blueprint for agreements to come. Lamis Andoni reports from Washington on the Clinton administration's frustration with the Hebron stalemate

In the first week of 1997, the American media and commentators joined their government in calling on the Palestinian leadership to sign an agreement over a redeployment of Israeli troops from the West Bank city of Hebron. The American mediator, Dennis Ross, who has been on a shuttle mission since last October, reportedly has warned that he might pack and leave if the Palestinians do not alter their stance. The US has made it clear to the Palestinians that they have to accept what the Israeli government has to offer or risk the collapse of the peace process.

American officials also have expressed their irritation at the team of Egyptian legal advisers for failing to press the Palestinians to accept the Israeli offer, short of a timetable for the Israeli withdrawals from territories that comprise most of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The American argument has so far been that the Hebron agreement will break the stalemate and create new dynamics that will propel the faltering peace process. The Palestinians, on the other hand, have argued that *without a linkage between the Hebron deal* and the rest of the withdrawals the peace process will not lead to the end of the Israeli occupation and thus the peace process will be in shambles.

For the US, however, the continuation of the peace process means first and foremost the continuity of the normalisation process between the Arabs and Israel, and consequently the integration of the latter in the region. According to administration officials who asked not to be named, "continuity" is a goal in itself since it will create new political and economic facts that will make peace an irreversible reality.

The stalemate over Hebron has become a serious hindrance to what American officials view as the gradual integration of Israel into the region. For example, despite the Arab governments' lukewarm attitude toward Israel during the Cairo economic summit, American officials viewed it as a success. According to one administration official, the Cairo summit *should be* assessed by the continuity of business deals and interaction between Arab and Israeli businessmen. Consequently, since deals were made or negotiated, the Cairo summit was considered successful.

Most recently, the Arab governments' reluctance, and sometimes refusal, to proceed with normalisation has raised concerns in Washington, according to diplomats and well-informed analysts. Most Arab governments, including those of Tunisia, Oman and even Jordan, have slowed down the normalisation of economic and political relations with Israel, mostly in protest of the continuing Israeli *settlements expansion*.

Also, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Damascus Seven strongly warned of their intention to freeze, if not reverse, the normalisation process. And contrary to the Arab states' expectations, instead of exerting pressure on Israel to halt its settlement activity, the US pressured the Palestinians to accept the Hebron deal without guarantees about where the negotiations are heading.

Again, the US has a different understanding of what works. According to the same administration officials, despite the fact that settlements remain an obstacle to peace, it could be surmounted *if* "trust is re-established between the Israelis and the Palestinians." After all, the officials point out, the settlement activities had gone on under the previous Labour government but that did not seem to affect the Palestinians as much. Based on this premise, the real problem, according to the officials, is not the settlements but getting the two sides to trust each other's commitment to the process. Furthermore, *if* this trust *is* re-established, the rest of the Arab world would feel at ease in continuing the normalisation process with Israel.

At the heart of the process of establishing trust, from the American viewpoint, is the Hebron agreement. In theory, Palestinian officials agree with this assessment. However, they point out that Yasser Arafat cannot afford to proceed and maintain a constituency for the peace process if the Hebron agreement, that already has little popular support, is not followed by significant steps indicating the beginning of the end of Israeli control.

Furthermore, Palestinian negotiators now say that Arafat has serious concerns that Israel is deliberately not committing itself to a timetable to give itself the choice of keeping most of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under its control when it enters the final status negotiations. Thus, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu will be able, or at least try, to pre-define the boundaries and limits of the final status of the Palestinian territories.

The fact that Oslo II does not include parameters for the three-phase withdrawal from areas under Israeli control either as "military areas" or "Israeli settlements", could be used by Netanyahu to his advantage. This is especially the case if the withdrawals are delayed or even skipped, Palestinian officials who long endorsed Oslo now concede.

But the US again has a different view. According to the administration officials already mentioned, the Hebron deal is in itself a crucial stepping stone for the final solution. American officials even talk about the Hebron deal as a potential model for future co-existence between the Palestinians and Israeli settlers. According to one source in the administration, the success of reaching and enforcing an arrangement on Hebron depends on guaranteeing the "security of both the settlers and the Palestinian population." The implications of such an understanding are clear and are not even denied by American administration officials. If signed, the Hebron agreement will determine the permanent status of the city and would pave the way for the Palestinian acceptance of the settlers' rights to stay in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In its leading editorial last Saturday, 4 January, *The New York Times* referred to the Israeli settlement in the heart of Hebron as "the Jewish enclave." The description clearly implies that the settlers have a legitimate right to be *there and that the Palestinians have to* accept this "reality." The newspaper has consistently supported the administration's policies on the Israeli-Palestinian talks. It, therefore, seems to have spelled out the future map of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where Israeli settlements would turn into Jewish enclaves.

Administration officials would not go so far in describing the future map of the area but they do repeatedly stress that evicting the settlers was never on the agenda of any side, at least in the formal negotiations. Consequently, reaching an agreement on Hebron will pave the way for both the *Israelis* and *the Palestinians* to accept the new realities of the political and demographic map of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. But first the US will have to make the Palestinians sign.

Almost an admission

Who is behind the Damascus bus bombing? Israel, writes Graham Usher, is not the remotest possibility

On New Year's Eve, a bomb ripped apart a bus at the Baramkeh bus station in central Damascus, leaving 11 civilians dead and over 40 injured. A report in the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Ra'y Al-'Amm* said on Saturday that the vehicle, on route to Aleppo, was stationary; its driver had left to "pick up some papers". The driver has since been arrested.

The Syrian government blacked out all news of the blast for two days. When it did go public on 2 January, the official Syrian Arab News Agency was crystal clear as to who it thought was behind the attack. "This terrorist, criminal, cowardly act comes amid the recent escalation of Israeli threats by a number of Israeli officials aiming to kill the peace process," it said.

The Israeli response to these charges has been apparent bemusement. "Sheer nonsense," said Netanyahu's chief media aide, David Bar-Ilan, in reply to Syria's accusations. *Netanyahu himself* vigorously denied any Israeli connection, adding that the blast was "a criminal brand of terrorism from which Israel also suffers". US State Department spokesperson, Nicholas Burns, condemned the attack but warned Syria not to indulge in "wild and irresponsible charges" that are detrimental to US attempts to revive the Israeli-Syrian peace process.

On the surface, there are grounds for Israel and the US's pique. Given its authoritarian and often brutal rule, Syria has no shortage of enemies, home and abroad. The Baramkeh explosion was the worst civilian atrocity in Syria since Assad crushed his Islamist opposition in Hama and other cities in 1982. Last spring, there was a wave of armed attacks in Syria, probably sponsored by Turkey in retaliation for Syria's support of PKK Kurdish militias based near the Syrian-Turkish border.

Yet observers are sceptical that either Islamism or Turkey is behind this latest hit. Since their mauling in 1982, Syria's opposition Islamist groups have focussed on cultural influence rather than military resistance. And while Syrian-Turkish relations are hardly friendly, they thawed somewhat with the election last July of a new Turkish government led by the Islamist Refah Party. Rather, say sources, the origins of the bus attack are likely to be found less in Syria than in its "sister" to the west, Lebanon.

On 18 December, one Syrian worker was killed and two others injured after their mini-bus was sprayed with gunfire in Tarbarja, a mainly Christian town north of Beirut. On the same day, bombings were reported in the Lebanese towns of Tripoli and Antelias, wounding six, including two Syrian soldiers. At around the same time leaflets were distributed in several Lebanese towns, calling on people to revolt against "the Syrian occupation which is transforming its rule" in Lebanon "into an ugly and repressive dictatorship". The communiqués were signed by a previously unknown group, "the rebel youths of the future".

Fearful of sectarian conflict, the Lebanese government met the attacks with a firm and (according to the human rights organisation, Amnesty International) excessive hand. Over the next two weeks, around 200 Lebanese were detained, mostly Maronite Christians, all without legal warrant. Amnesty alleges that several were tortured. Lebanese security figures said the sweep was aimed at cracking a "pro-Israeli network" bent on destroying "Lebanon's ties with brotherly and friendly countries" (i.e. Syria).

Lebanese sources say many of the detained were followers of Lebanon's Maronite ex-army commander (now exiled), Michel Aoun, members of the banned Lebanese forces led by Samir Geagea or supporters of the rightist National Liberal Party (NLP) headed by Dory Chamoun. All of these parties oppose Syria's presence in Lebanon. Aoun was ousted from Lebanon by the Syrian army at the close of the civil war in 1990. During the war, the NLP had links with Israel and recently there were Lebanese and Israeli press reports that Chamoun had met secretly with Netanyahu in Aqaba. NLP leaders have denied the charge.

Do the attacks against Syria in Lebanon and Damascus signal a return to armed resistance by Maronite Christian forces? Observers say it is unlikely. It is no secret that many members of the Maronite community were against the Syrian-brokered 1989 Taif accords which ended the civil war by establishing an equitable (if precarious) balance between Lebanon's four main confessional groups. Nor is it a secret that many Christians (and many other Lebanese) resent the presence of 35,000 Syrian troops in their country and the up to one million Syrian workers in their economy.

But figures like Aoun, Geagea and Chamoun now command minority support among the Maronites. Despite their calls for a boycott, many Maronite Christians participated in Lebanon's 1996 parliamentary elections, signalling that, while they may not like Syria's suzerainty in Lebanon, they are prepared to live with it. Nor has the Lebanese government *so far presented any evidence that the attacks* were orchestrated by Israel to force Lebanon to accept "Israel's definition of peace", as put by Lebanon's Foreign Minister Fares Buwayz.

But there is evidence that Israel is interested in raising the sectarian heat in Lebanon. Following the first waves of arrests, Israel's army commander in occupied South Lebanon, Uri Lubrani, warned that "those who are carrying out prosecutions... of the people of Lebanon, as well as their occupying patrons [i.e. Syria], are mistaken if they think they will escape accountability". He also urged the "Lebanese people" to throw the "occupiers east from whence they came". The Israeli *army currently* occupies around one tenth of all Lebanese territory, and rules over nearly 100,000 of its citizens, through its self-declared "security zone" in South Lebanon. For many Lebanese politicians, Lubrani's comments were tantamount to an admission that there was indeed an Israeli hand behind the attacks.

They are not an admission. But Lubrani's intervention is extremely dangerous — not just for sectarian peace to endure in Lebanon, but, as Syria's reaction to the Damascus bombing demonstrated, for peace to endure in the region as a whole.



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Erbakan's new world order

Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan hopes that his D-8 project will grow into a strong trade group of developing countries, despite warnings that the would-be economic bloc is but an old project made new. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports

The meeting of foreign ministers and *senior officials* from eight leading Islamic states on Saturday in Istanbul began with a prayer at the Ottoman-era Ciragan palace. This, in the view of many observers, was indicative of the message the Turkish prime minister wanted to send to the West. It shows that the developing eight group (D-8) is an entity based on religion, just like the European Union brings together Christian nations. Even though Erbakan's Western-oriented Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller tried to play down the Muslim aspect of the summit, it remained obvious, according to sources in Ankara, that the D-8 is an emerging economic and political bloc which bears an Islamic mark.

It was only last year that Erbakan *called for the creation of a group* uniting the eight Muslim countries with a population of more than 60 million people, to be patterned on the G-7 gathering of the world's seven most industrialised nations. The G-7, however, has come under heavy criticism because, in Erbakan's own words, "it takes decisions and then imposes them *on the world's nations. This only* creates instability. People who support materialism and the use of force will always make mistakes. The result will be massacres and disasters." Instead, the representatives of the D-8 gathered in Istanbul "for cooperation for a peaceful world," said Erbakan in his opening statement and so that the developing nations "*do not get richer and* the poorer get poorer."

Only a few *days* before the meeting was held, Erbakan told *Probe* magazine, an Istanbul-based English language weekly, that "a new world order is being established." The trade grouping "will contribute positively to the reshaping of the new world order which we believe should establish strong cooperation among the world's nations based on justice and equality." But the two-day summit which brought together foreign ministers and senior officials from Egypt, Turkey, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, in the view of many observers, did not bring the group closer to achieving Erbakan's vision of a new world order. The summit participants did not even reach a decision on their *coming plan of action*. Erbakan had hoped that a summit of the leaders of the member states would be agreed upon. However, bureaucratic issues such as the formation of the secretariat, relations between the *D-8* and the G-7 and whether or not the D-8's responsibilities would overlap with those of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) were the major issues on the agenda.

Sources close to Erbakan say that the Turkish prime minister has talked to Islamic leaders and has come to the conclusion that while there *is* a lack of leadership and coordination among the Muslim countries, everyone wants to overcome these defects. "For 12 years we have been beating around the bush and the D-8 could be a good beginning," Abdullah Gul, the foreign affairs expert in the Refah Party told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

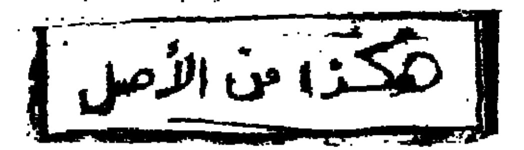
According to sources inside the Refah Party, Erbakan has received a show of support from Western leaders, particularly from French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. They both expressed "readiness to support dialogue between the D-8 and the G-7." Chirac reportedly told Indonesian Technology Minister B.J. Habibie that the D-8 should first complete its organisation and hold its summit and then a meeting with the G-7 could be arranged.

Among the eight participating countries, Egypt, the only representative of the Arab world and North Africa, re*mained cool to the project. While* Under-Secretary Foreign Minister of Egypt Sayed Kassem El-Masry dismissed reports that Egypt was the least sympathetic toward the creation of a system of cooperation among the eight states, he cautioned against being too hasty. "The formation of the D-8 is very important because it could mobilise the developing Islamic countries into a serious group and thus give it a say in world affairs. However, these things take time. Short-cuts could result in serious failures," El-Masry told the *Weekly*. He also dismissed the notion that an overlapping of duties might occur between the Organisation of Islamic Conference and the D-8. The Turkish prime minister was also intent on emphasising that the organisation is not an alternative for the OIC but stressed that "in its current form, the OIC cannot achieve much and has to be restructured."

Gul pointed out that the Turkish prime minister's ambitious plan to unite the eight biggest Islamic countries is based on six main principles which could well be the founding ideals for a new world order. These *ideals are*: peace — not war, dialogue — not conflict, justice — not double standard, cooperation — not exploitation, human rights and equality — not arrogance, ar*bitration — not the* use of force.

Erbakan has stated that Islamic countries should rapidly increase trade among themselves and thus add muscle to their cooperation. "Pakistan has incredible trade barriers for Turkish tractors while they charge zero customs duty for Italian tractors. This is not the way to increase trade ties among Islamic countries," Erbakan warned.

While in a break with tradition, Erbakan can boast for the time being of a new cross-border co-ordination between the eight biggest Islamic countries. Critics, on the other hand, have chided the Turkish prime minister for taking matters with too much haste, saying that the would-be trade bloc still has a long way to go. Many believe, however, that its mere creation reflects the Muslim countries' impatience with the stale polarities of the Western countries' conception of the new world or*der*.

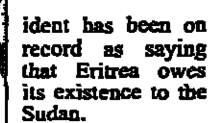


هكذا من الأصل

Uncertain skies

In last week's interview, Sadig Al-Mahdi, leader of the Sudanese Umma Party, accused Hassan Al-Turabi's regime of perpetrating racial genocide. Al-Turabi, speaker of the Sudanese parliament and Islamist leader, denies the allegations in an interview with **Gamal Nkrumah**





"Things grow more precarious by the day in Sudan," warned Sadig Al-Mahdi, former Sudanese Prime Minister and Umma Party leader, in Cairo after his meeting with President Hosni Mubarak. Chairman of the United States Joint Chief of Staff, General John Shalikashvili, also in Cairo, denied that America was funding and inciting armed rebellion against the regime in Khartoum. "First of all, we did not discuss that particular issue," Shalikashvili said after meeting President Mubarak on Tuesday. "Those are baseless allegations," he told reporters in Cairo.

The escalation of political tensions in Sudan last week was heightened by news of popular demonstrations in the centre of the capital, and by the mobilisation of Sudan's defense forces. Surprise visits by the country's leading military leaders to outlying regions of Sudan, where skirmishes between opposition and government forces are rife, also caused international concern. General Zubair Mohamed Saleh, Sudanese vice-president, toured the Sudanese-Eritrean border zone and Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir left Khartoum for Port Sudan, the country's chief port on the Red Sea, in order to inaugurate new military installations. Port Sudan, only some 150km from the Eritrean border, is the headquarters of the Sudanese navy. The Sudanese authorities announced that they would send supplies worth $750 million to Kassala province and Islamist militias closely aligned to the ruling National Islamic Front (NIF) are preparing an all-out assault on opposition forces in the north-eastern reaches of the country in areas along the Sudanese-Eritrean border.

Political uncertainty in Sudan was accentuated by reports of Sudanese forces opening fire on protesters in the capital. But in his interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Hassan Al-Turabi, speaker of the Sudanese Parliament and NIF leader, dismissed the political importance of Sadig Al-Mahdi's escape last month to the Eritrean capital, Asmara.

What, if any, is the importance of Sadig Al-Mahdi's escape from Khartoum? What are its ramifications?

Although Sadig Al-Mahdi's escape from Khartoum has some significance relating to his previous position as prime minister until 1989, and to his media-friendly nature, it does not add any remarkable weight to the opposition in exile. The media flare-up will soon die out as it runs out of relevant political material. Internally, Sadig may soon lose essential contact with his power base among the Ansar sect, with which he used to communicate directly at least every Friday through his congregational sermon. Other opposition figures are likely to benefit from the resulting vacuum and assume prominence in that area. The government will be faced with internal opposition without leadership, but this may not last for long, especially since replacements of Sadig's calibre are by no means hard to find.

How did Sadig Al-Mahdi escape from Khartoum even though security is very tight? Does this indicate problems in the Sudanese government's security system?

The minute details of Sadig's escape are not available. But it is not impossible for any individual with minimal assistance to quit the Sudan illegally. As for Sudanese security, it has been, in my view, preventive or defensive, rather than taking any direct action against Sadig's possible escape. Again, it has not been illegal for Sadig to speak or move about, and this must have contributed to the relative ease with which he was able to leave the country unnoticed. Finally, since the duty of the security system is to prevent threats to the country and not to restrict the movements of citizens, Sadig's escape from Sudan does not indicate a failure of this system.

Why are Sudan's neighbours — Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda, in particular — so keen on supporting the Sudanese opposition?

Relations between the Sudan and the three neighbours mentioned — Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda — have not been free of strain. They all have been difficult in different ways. Both Sudan and Uganda are dealing with armed rebellions, and both are interested in peace along their borders, but Uganda has long been one of the sanctuaries of John Garang, the Sudanese rebel leader, who has been launching offensives across the border and from within the jungles of southern Sudan.

As for Ethiopia, relations were clouded following the attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak by some Egyptian dissidents. Apart from this problem, which remains serious, Sudan has excellent relations with post-Mengistu Ethiopia. It is not yet clear whether Ethiopia supports Sudanese opposition elements on its soil, but currently the Ethiopian government's relations with Sudan are fairly poor, with low-key diplomatic representation in both countries.

Until early 1994, Eritrea enjoyed very good relations with Sudan, following close cooperation with the then liberation movement, now in power. Since April of that year, the Eritrean regime began to display strong signs of unilateral animosity, accusing Sudan of attempting to "export Islam". Diplomatic relations were severed, also unilaterally, by Eritrea in December 1994. Then Asmara took over the premises housing the Sudanese Embassy and invited the Sudanese opposition elements to use these premises for their subversive activities against Khartoum. The question 'Why is Eritrea keen on supporting Sudanese opposition?' should, however, ultimately be answered by the Asmara regime, whose president has been on record as saying that Eritrea owes its existence to the Sudan.

Are you afraid of a military and political alliance between Sadig Al-Mahdi and Dr John Garang?

The question of an unholy alliance between Sadig Al-Mahdi and John Garang is insignificant. Sadig is unlikely to join a political organisation headed by someone other than himself. The word "afraid" is unfortunately of little help in describing the reaction of any Sudanese citizen today to any such endeavour by Sadig Al-Mahdi.

Do you see a possible end to the tragedy of the war in southern Sudan? Do you accept self-determination for the South?

Indeed, I see an end to the civil war in southern Sudan in the not-so-distant future. The issue of self-determination has been settled through a political charter signed by the Sudanese government and most of the leading rebel factions in Khartoum in April 1996. Whatever that Charter and the would-be agreement might lead to will no doubt be accepted by all the concerned parties — the government and people of the Sudan, including the southerners. Such an option would certainly bring peace and stability to the country, and please everyone in the Sudan.

Anti-terrorist cooperation

The Arab Interior Ministers' Council agreed to implement a plan to increase cooperation against terrorism among the Arab countries, reports **Ahmed Moussa** from Tunis

All Arab countries with the exception of Somalia participated in the annual session of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council in Tunis which ended this week. For the first time, Arab ministers agreed on a definition of the term terrorism and made the distinction between terrorism and armed struggle against foreign occupation. By approving a comprehensive anti-terrorism plan, the interior ministers took a concrete step towards close cooperation between Arab states in fighting terrorism.

The plan includes procedures to extradite suspected terrorists and offer protection to witnesses. An Arab working group will be entrusted with the task of preparing a three-year interim plan for the implementation of the plan's provisions. Since the plan was unanimously approved, it can progress to the implementation stage without delay. Last July, a group of 15 Arab experts met in Cairo to review the text of the agreement before it was submitted to the Arab interior ministers this week.

Commenting on the subject in Tunis, Egyptian Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi said that Arab countries are now aware of the danger of terrorism and that is a success in itself. "In the past few years, most countries insisted that economic factors were at the root of terrorism. However, as more countries fall prey to terrorist attacks, there is a greater and more widespread condemnation of terrorism," added El-Alfi. At the 1995 session of the interior ministers' meeting, it was only Algeria which supported the Egyptian position. However in 1996, many countries adopted a different tone. And at this year's session, a consensus was reached about the need to fight it.

Minister El-Alfi stated that a common Arab plan to confront terrorism is a great step forward, however, what is more important is that the Arab countries are committed to the plan's implementation. El-Alfi recalled the terrorist attack that took place recently in Damascus and the other incidents that preceded it in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Libya. He reiterated the common Arab demand that the European countries who grant political asylum to suspected terrorists reconsider their position. The Egyptian intelligence service, said El-Alfi, has been made aware of some countries' attempts to deport suspected terrorists from their territory after it was confirmed that they were involved in recent terrorist incidents in Europe. The Egyptian interior minister warned that should the deported terrorists attempt to enter Egypt, the security service would be ready to arrest them.

Denouncing the activities of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, El-Alfi accused the movement of using religion as a disguise for its clandestine activities. He refuted reports that the Egyptian government has given its permission for the establishment of a religion-based party. This was an apparent reference to Al-Wasat's (Centre Group) attempt to establish an official party. "This is one of the Brotherhood's manoeuvres to turn around the law in order to reach their objective. This is well known to the security service," said El-Alfi.

The secretary-general of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council, Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al-Salem, said that last week's conference was one of the most successful because the ministers succeeded in adopting a common anti-terrorism plan. Al-Salem noted that over the past five years, Arab countries have lost 60,000 victims in terrorist attacks, in addition to a financial cost amounting to several billion dollars.

Colonel Ibrahim Hammad, secretary of the Egyptian Interior Ministry's Committee for International Cooperation, said that the anti-terrorism plan includes an interim plan to change the curricula in schools, as well as religious and media institutions, to ensure a proper representation of Islam and Arabism. The most significant article of the plan is the adoption of a common position towards any country that advocates terrorism. The plan also calls for measures to facilitate the handing over of suspects. Arab countries will henceforth commit themselves to take tougher measures to prevent the infiltration of terrorists and destructive elements and the smuggling of ammunition and explosives into Arab countries. It also calls on governments to cooperate in the freezing of assets of suspected terrorists and groups suspected of financing terrorist acts. Inter-Arab cooperation for the fighting of terrorism is also required in arresting and investigating suspects, exchanging expertise in dealing with terrorists in legal, judicial, procedural and technical matters.

There is a growing interest in the link between the media and security. It was recently announced that a conference would be held in Cairo later in the year for press officials of Arab interior ministries. Lieutenant Raouf El-Minawi, the deputy interior minister responsible for press relations, said that Egypt presented a working paper on its experience in media and security and that the presentation was well received by Arab ministers. The paper underscored the importance of the role the media can play in contributing to the development of a security strategy, assisting the security services and explaining its objectives to enhance public awareness of the threat of terrorism.

Sources in the security services predict that this year will witness greater inter-Arab cooperation in fighting terrorism and handing over suspects. In this regard, El-Alfi said that Arab countries are showing greater understanding with Egypt's requests to extradite suspects. He refused to give greater details, however, for security reasons and in order to ensure the success of measures adopted to expose the leadership of certain terrorist elements and their bases abroad.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

163 Sending journalists to accompany heads of state on visits abroad is a well-established custom. *Al-Ahram* set the precedent for this practice in Egypt 95 years ago, in the closing months of 1901, as Khedive Abbas II prepared to undertake a tour of Sudan. In this instalment of the *Diwan*, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** follows the controversy surrounding the selection of Egypt's press representative on the royal tour



The part played by the press in Khedive Abbas II's visit to Sudan first hit the headlines in *Al-Ahram*'s 24 October edition of 1901. Beneath the headline "Our Prince and Leader in the Sudan", it announced that Khedive Abbas II was to visit Egypt's southern neighbour the following month.

The political importance of the visit prompted *Al-Ahram* to publish an article the following day, suggesting that "writers for the press" should accompany the royal personage, "whose task it is to relay the news of these leaders, the details of their trip, facts about the country that they are visiting and other such information that informs and pleases the public." Such an arrangement should be at the government's expense, the article suggested.

On October 31, *Al-Ahram* reported with evident delight, that "if the information that has come to us is correct, this topic had been submitted before His Highness to solicit his opinion in this regard."

The following days, however, would deflate the sense of elation, because, as *Al-Ahram* reported, the government agreed to the request but ruled that "there is only enough room in that vast retinue for a single correspondent who will be sent in the name of the Arabic press."

On the evening of Friday, 15 November, 15 owners or representatives of Egypt's major daily and weekly Arabic-language newspapers met at the offices of *Al-Ahram*. The assembly adopted two resolutions. Firstly, it decided that the representative would not be the owner of one of the daily newspapers, but rather "an owner of one of the general non-scientific periodicals." Secondly, it decided that a meeting would be held the following day in the offices of *Al-Muqattam* to elect the representative.

The first resolution provoked considerable controversy. Those in favour argued that "if the owner of a daily newspaper is elected, his newspaper will gain and the other daily newspapers will suffer because he will have the monopoly on everything that he sees and learns." Those opposed argued that the dailies were being denied a right which they had earned. *Al-Ahram* took the middle ground. What was important was "to elect one of the journalists, whoever it may be."

Evidently, Sheikh Ali Youssef, owner of *Al-Mu'ayyid*, who had acted as the meeting's chairman, had to leave early, for the following day he moved to have the previous meeting declared null and void, because he had left before it had been officially adjourned.

The second meeting, which was held in the offices of *Al-Muqattam*, was of an entirely different character. According to *Al-Ahram*, were its procedures to be published in full "it would be one of the most delightful and instructive chapters of anything that has been written upon principles that can serve to guide us."

Proceedings opened with Sheikh Ali Youssef's move to nullify the resolutions of the previous day on the grounds that those who left early did not have the opportunity to cast their ballot, contrary to what was written in the minutes of that session.

Faris Nimr of *Al-Muqattam* objected. The resolutions were legitimate, he argued, since they were based on a numerical majority. "There was no need to mention that Sheikh Youssef and two other members had left, since that had no bearing on the majority who ratified it." He added that the previous day's chairman had "violated the sanctity of the procedures and, by withdrawing from the meeting, he failed to perform his duty of abiding by the decision of the majority. He should be grateful that this conduct was not mentioned in the minutes."

A compromise was reached when one of those present moved that both Sheikh Ali Youssef and Guindi Effendi Ibrahim, owner of *Al-Watan*, draft the alterations to the minutes that each of them respectively deemed appropriate, after which their versions would be subject to a vote. As was expected, Guindi's version was approved by the majority.

Then Sheikh Youssef moved that the daily newspapers should not be excluded from the right to send a representative. When his proposal again failed to win a majority, he, along with seven others, walked out. The seven remaining participants then elected Aziz Bek Zind, owner of *Al-Mahrusa*.

Meanwhile, the eight participants who had walked out met in the *Misr* offices. They had added an additional member to their numbers: Sheikh Mohamed El-Shurbatli, editor of *Al-Afkar*. In their meeting they resolved "to reformulate the committee of the Egyptian Arabic language newspapers and to view the resolutions of yesterday's meeting as null and void." When the process of electing the delegate began, Sheikh Youssef announced that he would not be standing for nomination since he planned on travelling at his own expense. The assembly then elected Ibrahim Ramzi Bek, owner of *Al-Mutameddin*.

With two elected delegates contending for a single place in the khedive's retinue, matters had reached a deadlock. *Al-Ahram* proposed "that both of the elected delegates stand down and that we nominate instead Mohamed Bek El-Muweilhi, the editor-in-chief of *Misbah Al-Sharq*, who is a distinguished writer and highly capable of performing the task required of him."

It appeared that there was no alternative but to accept *Al-Ahram*'s proposal, but this could not happen without a face-saving gesture. Both sides agreed that the delegates who had been selected would tender their resignation as delegates before the group that had nominated them. Also in the interests of form, all the newspapers involved would print their resignation speeches in full. The newspapers also published each group's vote of acceptance of their delegate's resignation and their nomination of El-Muweilhi.

On 26 November *Al-Ahram* published a semi-official communiqué saying, "After reaching unanimous agreement, we have notified the Ministry of War, which has issued its approval and agreed to subsidise the telegraph expenses of the correspondent in Sudan. We also anticipate that the Egyptian Telegraph Authority will offer its services free of charge for this occasion. The press delegate will be accompanying His Royal Highness on this 14-day tour and he will be a guest of the government of Sudan in the name of the Egyptian press."

El-Muweilhi was not to be the only press representative to accompany the khedive. For company he had the "representative of the English press," the editor-in-chief of the *Egyptian Gazette*.

From Aswan, on Thursday evening, 27 November, "delegate El-Muweilhi", as he referred to himself, dispatched his first telegram. It was quickly followed by another one later that evening and three more the following day. The dispatches provided a detailed description of the reception that was given to the khedive in Aswan by the commander-general and a number of senior British and Egyptian officers.

At nine the following morning, three boats set off for the cataracts, El-Muweilhi reported. After 42 hours of navigating up the Nile, the royal procession reached Al-Tawfiqiya, where other reception ceremonies awaited the khedive. From Al-Tawfiqiya the entourage boarded a train for the ten-minute trip to Wadi Halfa where they spent the night.

After a five-hour trip by rail the following day, the khedival cortege arrived at the first of Sudan's major cities from where the "delegate of the press" wired a dispatch in which he provided, in addition to a description of the official reception, information regarding the representatives of other newspapers. Beyond the customary ranks of government and military officials who had greeted the khedive during his stop-overs up to that point, this reception was highlighted by "ranks of tribal chiefs in red and green costumes and a large gathering of Bedouins atop their camels and horses, with flags and banners fluttering above." This was also occasion for El-Muweilhi to meet the owner of *Al-Mu'ayyid* and the owner of *Misr*, both of whom had travelled at their own expense.

On 3 December, the royal cortege arrived in Khartoum where the major events of the official visit were to take place. The "delegate of Egypt's Arabic-language press" would have much to cover. He was not only responsible to his own newspaper, but to all the other newspapers who had delegated him. That he had risen to the task before him is evidenced by the care and detail which he devoted to his reportage. He had no cause to worry about the number of words in his lengthy reports since he was sending them at the government's expense.

The khedive's first visit during his stay in the Sudanese capital was to Al-Karari, the site of the final battle between troops of the Egyptian expedition and Mahdist forces, signalling the fall of the Mahdist state. After reminding his readers of the events of that battle, which had taken place four years previously, El-Muweilhi describes how the khedive had "stood at the edge of the site for nearly an hour and a half, surveying the scene of the battle arena with his binoculars, as a crowd of nearly 4,000 spectators looked on, uttering praise to God and expressions of gratitude, goodwill and hope."

Perhaps the most important occasion during the khedive's visit to Khartoum was that which took place on 5 December at 3pm, with the exchange of speeches between the khedive and the commander-general in Khartoum. The speeches, one in Arabic and the other in English, were delivered in front of the commander-general's headquarters in Khartoum to an audience consisting of "officers, royalists, dignitaries and *ulamas* in costumes." The khedive's speech was tantamount to raising the white flag with regard to the Egyptian-British contention over the administration of Sudan. He said: "The British and Egyptian flags which are flying side by side are a sign of the joint government which has taken upon its shoulders the task of protecting the people of Sudan from falling into the grips of tyranny and corruption. They mark the beginning of an era of happiness and prosperity in this region."

Following the speeches, the khedive proceeded into the garden of the commander-general's headquarters "where pavilions had been set up containing tables of food and refreshments."

The following day, 6 December, was another important occasion. According to El-Muweilhi's report, the khedive visited Omdurman early that morning. Once he arrived, "he mounted a horse and led a lengthy procession through the streets until he arrived at the home of the Mahdist ruler. Here the khedive paused for a moment before the site from which Al-Khalifa had governed. A throng of nearly 20,000 looked on."

Both the official reception and the popular reception he received, particularly during the Friday prayers at the new mosque in Khartoum, made the khedive "extremely delighted with his visit to the Sudanese capital, as it demonstrated how close all the Sudanese people feel towards His Royal Highness."

On Saturday, 7 December, the khedive began his return voyage. Al-Muwelhi's final report was sent from Aswan on 10 December at 9am. He reported that, after touring the city, the khedive proceeded to the Aswan Dam, "where he stood for a moment to contemplate the gushing waters and watch a competition among local residents steering logs through the rapids while waving colourful green, black and white flags."

Al-Muweilhi did not omit a final note of gratitude "to those who have elected me as their delegate and to whom I offer my highest praise and humblest resignation upon the conclusion of my mission." Nor did *Al-Ahram* neglect its duty in reply. El-Muweilhi, it wrote, "merits our highest praise and gratitude for the dedication and skill with which he has supplied the Egyptian newspapers with the fullest and most entertaining accounts of the events that have marked this most important royal tour." History, for its part, has performed its task of commemorating Ibrahim El-Muweilhi Bek, editor-in-chief of *Misbah Al-Sharq* as the first representative of the Egyptian press to accompany a head of state abroad.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

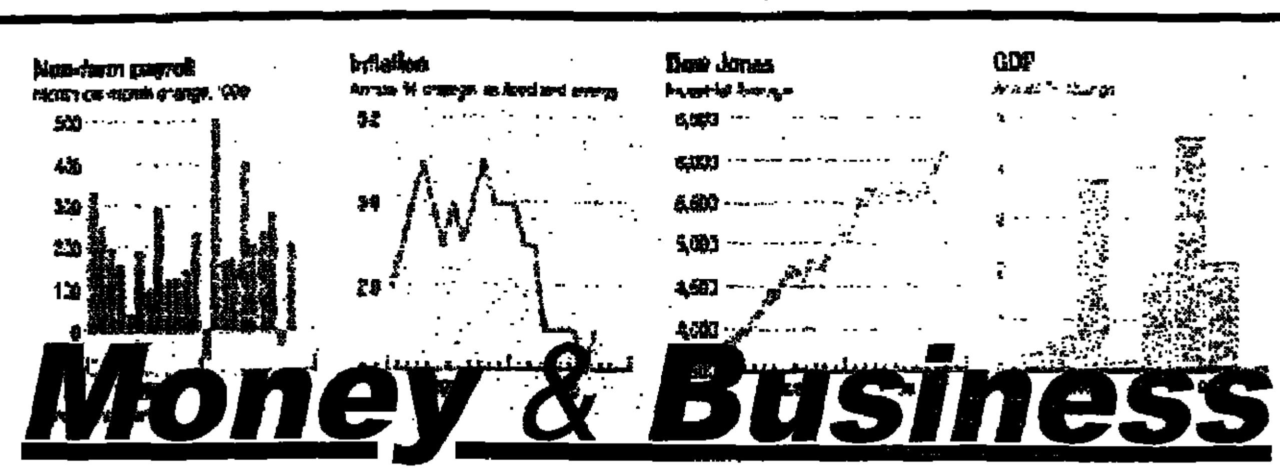


Saudi Arabia leading investment in Egypt

IBRAHIM Fawzi, chairman of the Investment Authority, stated that Arab and foreign investments in Egypt are estimated at 40 per cent of the total volume of investments in Egypt.

Fawzi noted that Saudi Arabia is currently the largest investor in Egypt, followed by Kuwait and Libya ranking number two and three respectively.

The United Kingdom and France are the leading non-Arab investor countries in Egypt, Fawzi added.



28 countries in the Cairo trade fair

THE INTERNATIONAL Exhibitions and Fairs Authority began preparations for the 30th Cairo International Fair which will take place from 19-28 March 1997. Rushdi Saqr, chairman of the authority, stated that 28 countries expressed an interest in participating in the fair, among which are Italy, Germany, Russia, China, Korea, Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Spain, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the United States, Kuwait and India.

Egyptian Computer Association organises conferences

The first of its kind in the Middle East, the Egyptian *Computer Association* was established in 1970. Since its inception, it has arranged numerous computer training programmes for many people from Egypt and the Arab world. The association likewise publishes a bi-annual publication, and holds lectures and conferences. Among these conferences is the annual *Computer and Data Processing Conference*, now in its 22nd year. This *year's conference is scheduled to take place in April 1997.*

Dr **Ahmed Abbada Sirhan**

The assembly is also responsible for organising research projects and committees on computer-related topics. Since 1977, the association has focused its research on the Arabicisation of computers. *In 1992, the association* held a conference on this topic, which involved Arab experts and a number of experts from France, Germany and Holland. A number of suggestions were implemented as a result of this conference, which was financed by *Faisal Islamic* Bank. Although the necessary financing for *research could not be provided on an* Arab level, the Egyptian Amac Cen*tre funded the first stage of research on the Arabicisation project.* This first stage involved sorting over 20 million words and 3 thousand roots, as well as taking into consideration the different aspects of morphology, syntax and grammar.

Starting in 1992, the Egyptian Computer Association has organised *an annual* conference for artificial intelligence. This year, the fifth round of this conference will be held from 27 February until 2 March 1997. Participating in the organisation and sponsorship of this important conference are the computer science departments from the University of Helwan and the American University. Over the years, *this conference* has become a truly international one, with a number of international experts in this field taking part. *During the time of this conference, the* largest computer exhibition will be taking place, the Al-Ahram Computer Exhibition, from 28 February to 2 March 1997, in which a large number of companies and organisations operating in the field of computers will participate, including the Egyptian Computer Association.

NBE records the highest profitability in 1995/1996

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt (NBE) has recorded the highest *surplus available for distribution* amounting to LE130 million (representing 41.5 per cent of the total four public sector commercial banks) with an upswing of 30 per cent over the previous year. In addition, NBE's total footings amounted to LE86.4 billion, deposits reached LE39.2 billion and loans and investments recorded LE33.5 billion as of 30 June 1996.

Moreover, NBE has embarked upon boosting its capital base mainly manifested in the increase in capital and reserves to *record LE1.9 billion* (7 per cent) as well as provisions to amount to LE5.1 billion (20.8 per cent) as of 30 June 1996. To this end the bank has succeeded in maintaining the international standard capital adequacy ratios.

In its November 1996 issue, *The Banker* magazine published the list of the top 100 banks where NBE ranked first among Egyptian banks and third among Arab banks in terms of total assets.

The bank's figures reflect a sound efficiency in mobilising savings by innovating savings pools that match the various categories of the society as well as customers' preferences.

In addition to the foregoing, NBE's extensive domestic network (320 banking units) has played a crucial role in attracting savings, a fact that has earned the bank its pioneering position among *public sector commercial banks* in terms of deposits, with a growth ration of 11 per cent.

Moreover, NBE has succeeded in maintaining its catalytic role in issuing Egypt's largest savings pools namely, savings certificates. Net sales of the said certificates, since their introduction in 1965 and until June 1996, amounted to LE21.1 billion, recording an increase of 19 per cent over the previous year.

The bank's success in mobilising savings has positively affected the finance extended to different economic sectors. Total loans and investments accounted for LE33.5 billion, with a growth rate of 18 per cent, recording thus the highest figures compared to public sector commercial banks. NBE has also pursued its support to the industrial sector, as total loans extended thereto amounted to LE7.5 billion as of 30 June 1996, with an increase of 14 per cent. Meanwhile, total finance provided to the agricultural sector amounted to LE249 million.

Moreover, NBE has always been keen to cope with the state-of-the-art technologies in the banking industry. Accordingly, the bank has adopted the concept of universal banking, extending traditional and non-traditional services without being confined to certain activities of commercial or investment banks. This enhances the bank's competitiveness, especially with the international trend geared towards the globalisation of banking activities, liberalisation of financial services and banks' mergers and groupings.

In this respect, the bank's strategy is tilted towards the expansion in non-traditional services; mainly stimulation of the capital market, clearing, expanding ownership base via establishing mutual as well as closed equity funds. Furthermore, NBE offered part of its equity stake in the CIB in the form of GDRs, and this was followed by a *similar offering* of the Suez Cement Co.

The bank has equity participations in 162 projects, with a total capital of LE16.4 billion. It has also embarked upon the imple*mentation of infrastructure projects* according to the system of BOT. This is in addition to participating *in the gigantic project* of the Nile-Sat, and establishing the Real Estate Market as a preliminary step for a *commodity market*. It is worth mentioning that the bank issued further credit cards, besides launching the NBE MasterCard and expanding the programme of retail banking.

Internationally, NBE maintained its sound presence in the world markets via the National Bank of Egypt International Ltd — London, its equity participation in the Arab American Bank, New York, Johannesburg representative offices, in addition to a wide network of 1,300 correspondents worldwide.

El-Arabi re-elected chairman of the Chambers of Commerce Federation

For the third time, Mahmoud El-Arabi was re-elected chairman of the Egyptian *Chambers of Commerce* Federation. Vice-president of the chamber in Alex*andria, Khaled Abu-Ismail*, was elected first vice-president of the Union, while Ahmed Arafa, president of the General Investors Group was elected second vice-president. The president of the Port Said Chamber of Commerce, Mohamed El-Misri, was elected secretary-general. President of Tenth of Ramadan Investors Organisation, Redallah Helmi, was elected treasurer while president of the Assiut Chamber of Commerce, Ibrahim Abul-Uyun, was elected assistant treasurer.

In his meeting with board members of the Egyptian Chambers of Commerce *Federation and board members* of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce, Minister of Trade and Supplies Ahmed Guweili emphasised that the new look of the board, which has changed by 60 per cent, is comprised of some of the top business leaders in Egypt. He also explained that the federation is seeking a greater role for the forthcoming period.

It is expected that Egypt *will face serious challenges* in the future, but since it joined the World Trade Or*ganisation last January*, Egypt will be able to overcome these obstacles. Gu*weili also indicated that be*cause trade has a strong influence on global events, the Chambers of Commerce should take their membership in the World Trade Organisation seriously and abide by its rules and conditions. The minister also said that dealing with the World Trade Organisation is totally different from dealing with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which do not have a direct impact on the other countries' commercial activities. On the *other hand, agreements* with the World Trade Organisation are obligatory and *countries not complying* with its rules are subject to fines.

The meeting of the board of Chambers of Commerce Federation, where elections for the next four years took place, was held last week. After the elections, the board announced that the coming phase will witness development in all its branches in the governorates to be able to realise an era of free trade and an open market in Egypt.

German-Arab Chamber of Commerce holds symposium

THE GERMAN-Arab Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with the Environmental Conservation Organisation and the Egyptian Federation of Industries, held a symposium on 16-17 December 1996 on environmental management in the business and investment fields. Participating in the symposium were: Atef Obeid, minister of state for administration and environment and Selah Hafez, head of the Environmental Affairs Association.

Dr Peter Gopfrich, executive director of the chamber, stressed the importance of the ISO 14000 organisation and the positive influence it can have on the environment.

Obeid emphasised the importance of conserving green areas and preventing their loss from urbanisation which expands day by day.



Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt

Sale by auction

According to the ruling No. 517 of 1996
Ismailia court issued in 28/11/1996

Al Qanal Fish factory
located in Ismailia Industrial Zone is offered for sale

Selling procedures
will take place on 25/1/1997 10 a.m.
at the factory's head office

A bid bond of L.E. 10000 (Ten thousand Egyptian pounds) to be paid and to be completed to 30% at the auction.

Particulars of sale to be requested from the Estimator

Mostafa Gouda
21 Abdel Salam Aref St. Tel:226054 Port Said

and from Faisal Bank's head office
Legal Affairs Dept. Tel:5743351
1113 - Cornich El Nil - Cairo

ZEIN

Business news

Promoting Egyptian-South African trade

AHMED Guweili, minister of trade and food supply, told the Economic Committee of the People's Assembly, headed by Mustafa El-Said, that his ministry is seeking to establish a navigational line connecting Suez and South Africa. This, Guwelli stated, will help boost trade between the two countries.

Employment priority for Gulf states citizens

LABOUR ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) began two-day talks on employment opportunities in the Gulf *states. Jamil Al-Huqailan*, secretary-general of the GCC, said that employment should be given priority to citizens of the Gulf *states*. This comes in line with the states' campaign to reduce dependence on foreign labour.

Medical expertise exchanged

AN AGREEMENT was signed between Cairo Scan and Cleveland Hospital in the United States. Attending the ceremony were *Mr Mohamed Abdel-*Wahab Mahmoud, Cairo Scan chairman, Hatem El-Gabali, *general manager and managing director for investment affairs* and Dr Michael Modic of the Cleveland Hospital.

According to the agreement, a second medical opinion can be given to patients examined *at Cairo Scan. The agreement* will result in the exchange of expertise through visiting doctors *for three years. The two sides* will also hold a wide range of conferences.

NATIONAL BANK OF EGYPT



وكالة الأهرام للإعلان

هكذا من الأصل

Privatisation defended

Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid went all out to defend the government's privatisation programme against criticism from left-wing MPs. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

Parliamentary regulations dictate that deputies are prevented from exercising supervision on the government's performance until the prime minister delivers the government's annual policy statement before the People's Assembly. And with the statement having been delivered two weeks ago, MPs rushed this week to make up for lost time, firing off a list of questions directed against leading government ministers.

Topping the MPs' list was Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid, who was forced not only to respond to attacks by the leftist-oriented MP, El-Badri Farghali, but also to review the last three years' privatisation programme results.

Farghali accused Ebeid of selling off a number of strategic public sector companies, such as the Steam Boilers Company, at an under-valued price. Other charges included plans to sell off maritime transport and service companies at the expense of national security interests and of laying off more than 250,000 employees without providing them with adequate compensation.

These charges, said Ebeid, "are void of all truth". The Boilers Company, he explained, was sold because it proved to be a "big failure and a major loss-making company which was sold, at a better price than expected, after closely evaluating the matter." According to Ebeid, the company was sold for LE57 million, while its book value is only LE5 million. Citing other examples of companies sold for more than their book value, Ebeid listed Pepsi Cola, which was listed for LE29 million but was sold for LE137 million and Coca-Cola, which was listed for LE80 million and sold for LE323 million.

Moreover, he said, the Ministerial Privatisation Committee decided to privatise only 10 per cent of all the maritime companies due to their importance for national security.

Tackling the issue of employee layoffs, Ebeid noted that no employees were fired. In fact, he stated, 288 Employee Shareholders' Associations have been formed in various companies, giving the employees the opportunity to buy 10 per cent of the shares in instalments over a period of eight years.

Addressing the parliament's Industrial Committee, Ebeid delivered a detailed statement outlining the reasons behind adopting the privatisation programme in Egypt. The statement included an explanation of the steps taken so far to privatise public sector companies and the means by which their assets were valued.

The huge number of loss-making public sector companies, he explained, was the impetus behind launching the new privatisation programme in Egypt.

"In 1991, we found that the number of state-owned companies had increased drastically over a 30-year period [since the early 1960s]," said Ebeid. By 1991, this figure had neared the 4,000 companies-mark. Meanwhile, the level of national savings in Egypt was too small to be instrumental in carrying out development plans. The figure for the government's real income — the difference between revenues and expenditures — was a mere LE12 billion per year. According to Ebeid, this meant that Egypt, which suffers from a high population growth rate, fell way short of the LE30 billion per year needed to implement its ambitious development plans aimed at meeting the needs of its growing population. "This is why the switch to privatisation was not only logical, but inevitable if the country was to generate the finances required for development" he said.

The ensuing road to privatisation, however, he said, was not easy. Out of a list of 312 companies to be sold, only a fraction of them have been privatised. "While this list formed the first group of companies the state decided to privatise, no decision has yet been taken to privatise the remaining public-sector companies," noted Ebeid.

The public sector minister explained that one third of the 312-listed companies had incurred losses amounting to LE7.5 billion over the past 30 years. Their debts and financial commitments, however, totaled LE66 billion. "This is the predicament the government faced and was expected to overcome prior to privatising the companies," he said.

But the problems to be encountered were more than financial. The government, experienced in nationalising companies, but not in privatising, brought in foreign privatisation experts to assist it with the programme and the valuing of the assets of public sector enterprises.

With the help of these officials, the Public Enterprise Office, over the past three years, set a provisional value of LE50.5 billion for roughly 85 per cent of the 312 companies scheduled to be privatised. Ebeid noted that the sale price of the companies is set by 66 experts from the various holding companies, the Central Auditing Agency and the Ministerial Privatisation Committee, which is made up of the 16 cabinet ministers, the president of the stock market and the governor of the Central Bank of Egypt.

"Over the last three years, we have managed to totally sell off six companies, privatise 35 companies through the stock market, sell off 10 land reclamation companies and liquidate eight agricultural companies. This means that only 49 companies have been completely or partially privatised over this three-year period," Ebeid recounted. "It also means that the end of the privatisation story in Egypt is still far off in the future."

Food for thought

Abbas Al-Khafaji examines ways of strengthening agricultural research centres in Arab countries

While the majority of officials and academics in Arab countries, over the last 25 years, have recognised the importance of agricultural research in improving crop productivity, much of this recognition has been confined to statements in reports and declarations. In other words, the theories have yet to be implemented or applied.

To accelerate and promote this kind of research, Arab countries have shifted from the traditional organisation of research by disciplines, such as plant breeding and soil and entomological research, to coordinated commodity research projects. To this end, they have, in part, followed the Indian example, when in 1957 this South Asian country launched a national maize research. By 1965, the project was obviously a success, and similar ones were launched for other crops such as rice, wheat, sorghum and millet. As a result, India's annual production of food grains increased from an average of 80-85 million tons in the mid-1960s to 130-140 million tons in recent years.

In general, organised agricultural research, in its present form, was first introduced in the 1950s and 1960s. In the Arab world, agricultural research was conducted by departments in the various ministries of agriculture. In Kuwait and Yemen, for example, agricultural research is part of the Ministry of Agriculture. This system, in its various forms, was not without its flaws.

In studies conducted by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the International Service for National Agricultural Research on the Arab world's agricultural methods and programme, several problems were identified. At the top of the list was the fact that agricultural research, as a scientific service essential for the improvement of crops, enjoyed almost no political support. Equally significant is that the structure of agricultural research organisations tends to focus on one main crop, while neglecting the value other crops may hold for the particular country.

Third on the list of problems noted by these studies was the poor quality of the crops and, at times, the lack of necessary material and information. Other problems included insufficient incentives, motivation and remuneration of agricultural workers.

To tackle the research issues, many of the Arab countries, such as Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, established what came to be known as national research councils or centres. Unfortunately, these organisations were not without their shortcomings. Many of the employees of these councils did not even recognise the need to be accountable for their research results, or to be responsible for relaying their findings to the necessary segments of the society and government. Moreover, horizontal communication systems between various research institutions were inadequate in Arab countries due to the fragmentation of responsibilities. And the fact that research results were not always conveyed accurately, or at all, to farmers, as a result of inadequate communication between researchers and extension agents, meant that crop productivity was nowhere near optimum.

For example, in Libya, researchers are essentially unaware and uninformed about research being undertaken by fellow scientists throughout the region. As such, National Research Centre scientists in Tripoli are more in tune with the research being done in Western countries than that being carried out in Egypt or Iraq. Compounding matters, young researchers often tend to "re-invent the wheel" when they return from studying abroad.

But aside from communication problems, these centres are plagued by a host of other logistical and technical difficulties on a national level. Libya, Sudan, Egypt and Syria, for example, do not have enough resources, whether in the form of land, people or equipment, to allocate to research in accordance with stated national priorities. Water management research is a case in point. While the issue is of paramount importance to all Arab countries, research in this field is conspicuously absent. Olive production in Tunisia, as another example, brings in 40 per cent of the nation's agricultural income, while the crop is allocated only 5 per cent of the total research fund for agriculture.

In part, the answer lies in the fact that only cash crops, those used in garment production or irrigation issues, receive the majority share of the researchers' attention, while the problems of rural areas and crops fed by rainfall are vastly ignored in many Arab countries.

Additionally, agricultural research funds are generally included in the Ministry of Agriculture's total budget. In Egypt, for example, only 0.05 per cent of the ministry's budget is earmarked for agricultural research. These limited funds are often disbursed in a manner inconsistent with the needs and nature of agricultural research. As a result, funds and other resources allocated for research are the biggest losers when it comes to across-the-board budget cuts.

When coupled with the aforementioned problems associated with lack of worker accountability, motivation and compensation, with employees receiving the same wages regardless of the quality of their work, it is clear these managerial problems hinder the systematic continuation of agricultural research in the Arab world. It is ironic that many Arab officials and scientists have spoken out in favour of more support when the existing resources, however scarce, are not effectively utilised.

In this light, immediately improving managerial efficiency, establishing for agricultural research a measure of autonomy from the bureaucracy of government, while improving the ties of cooperation and understanding with national planners and policy makers, are important steps for promoting agricultural research as an integrated and productive system in the countries of the region.

Finally, a national crop research project in each Arab country can be used as the impetus for holding regular meetings between all project scientists and other key researchers involved in the development and improvement of this crop. By inviting others involved in this field, such as marketing economists and seed production specialists, these annual meetings can serve as a national forum for discussing the latest discoveries relating to this commodity.

The writer is an Iraqi agricultural extension expert residing in Egypt.



Harvesting an abundant orange crop *photo: Antoune Albert*

Fruits of reform

New and improved agricultural methods have allowed farmers not only to meet domestic fruit and vegetable needs, but also expand into international markets. Niveen Wahish reports

After years of barely meeting local demand for horticultural crops such as fruits, vegetables, ornamental plants and flowers, Egyptian farmers have spent the last decade upgrading and expanding their operations to cater to both the local and export markets.

According to Seifeddin Abu Bakr of the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI), although Egypt's northern coast was known as Europe's garden during the Roman era, and was used to grow many of these crops, farmers continued to use traditional farming techniques thereby restricting crop yield.

But as the 1980s rolled around, bringing with it a new era of economic and technical cooperation with countries such as the US, Egyptian farmers were able to implement new agricultural techniques such as greenhouses, as well as introduce new varieties of popular crops. These innovations proved to be invaluable, particularly in reclaimed desert areas.

"They resulted not only in a greater variety of crops, but also led to a greater yield and stronger crops," said Abu Bakr. "Sometimes, these crops were available year-round, thanks to the use of greenhouses."

The introduction of new farming techniques also meant that crops such as apples, which are not indigenous to Egypt, could be grown locally and in abundance. Consequently, while the price of imported Lebanese or American apples was LE10 per kilo, their local counterparts can be had for LE2, making them accessible to Egyptians with limited budgets.

Abu Bakr said that many of those who purchased reclaimed lands, planted them with horticultural crops because they are able to withstand high levels of salinity and drought. In fact, he noted, they do not require as much water as more traditional cash crops. Olive productions, added Abu Bakr, is a case in point. While Egyptian farmers in the past had allocated only 10,000 feddans for growing olives, that area has now increased to 74,000 feddans, of which 50,000 feddans have begun to bear fruit.

This expansion has had an extremely positive impact on the economy. First, olives can be used to either produce oil, which Egyptian consumers need but find expensive since it is usually imported, or they can be pickled. In either case, the cultivation of olives is a labour intensive industry, meaning that valuable new jobs have been created for Egyptian workers.

Similarly, these new measures have helped Egyptian farmers and food processing companies to make headway into the lucrative export market. These companies, however, have opted to cater more to neighbouring markets such as those of Europe, where they have a comparative advantage over locally grown crops in terms of growth cycle and climate.

According to Abu Bakr, in cases where Egyptian crops are not suited for export in their natural form, they can be processed into a variety of goods such as juices, jams or preserved fruits.

Flowers and household plants, such as the Christmas poinsettias, are also another source of export revenue for Egyptian growers, who are able to capitalise on the lengthy European winter months during which few of these plants can grow.

But, said Samia El-Orabi of the HRI's Fruit Handling Department, despite having access to lucrative European markets, some wrinkles must be ironed out on the Egyptian side. "Some of the problems faced by exporters are related to the fact that some of them do not know what standards of quality are demanded by the country to which they wish to export," she said. Moreover, the lack of proper cooling systems and problematic transportation mechanisms mean that these crops often arrive spoiled or rotten.

However, given the recent strides made in promoting quality control, Egyptian private sector companies are "being careful to abide by European standards in order to ensure that their products are not returned," said El-Orabi. For their part, Egyptian farmers who cater primarily to export markets, are making an effort to limit their use of pesticides and to package the products in a manner that appeals to foreign consumers.

Farouk Qandil, export manager of the Projects Investments Consulting Company (PICO), a firm specialising in agricultural exports, said that Egyptian crops have a strong export potential. But the problem with the European market, he added, is that there is strong competition between Egypt and countries with similar climates such as Spain. To overcome this obstacle, noted Qandil, Egyptian exporters could begin targeting Eastern European markets which have still not attracted much competition. But more importantly, he stressed, Egyptian commercial representation offices should offer greater assistance to growers by providing them with the names of efficient importers, for example.

Moreover, to make Egyptian agricultural exports more competitive, he stated that freight expenses should be reduced since the cost of shipping the goods sometimes reaches 50 per cent of the value of the product itself. "This affects the final price and, accordingly, our chance of selling because when a consumer is presented with a variety of crops of equal quality, he will look for the best price," explained Qandil.

Tourism booms

ACCORDING to a recent statement by Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui, tourism revenues in 1996 reached an all-time high of LE3.9 billion — a figure which contributed significantly to Egypt's hard currency revenues last year, reports **Rehab Saad**.

Figures revealed in the 1995/96 Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) report indicate that tourism is providing the country with a source of hard currency at a time when revenues from non-oil exports and Egyptian worker remittances, as well as Suez Canal revenues have been decreasing.

The CBE report reveals that tourism revenues increased by 30.9 per cent in 1995/96 compared to 1994/95. Meanwhile, revenue from petroleum and petroleum products exports increased by only 2.3 per cent.

The Ministry of Tourism attributed the increase of revenues to the unprecedented increase in the number of tourists, bringing the total number of visitors to Egypt to 3.8 million in 1996.

Efforts by the ministry to draw in tourists from new markets seem to have paid off in 1996. "The MOT has succeeded over the last few years to develop some new markets which serve as a strategic reserve in the case that traditional markets are affected for any reason in the future," said El-Beltagui. These new markets include the Benelux countries from which, in 1996, 55.9 per cent more tourists came to Egypt than in 1995. Other increases in tourists came from Russia (14.8 per cent), Switzerland, Japan, the Scandinavian countries, Australia, Korea and South Africa, noted El-Beltagui.

Also helping bring this figure to aa new high was the fact that tourists from a single country in some cases exceeded the 159,00 and 300,00-mark. These markets include Germany, Italy, Israel, France and the US. But topping the list were Gulf Arab tourists, with Saudi Arabia leading the pack. Accounting for 24.8 per cent of total tourists in Egypt, roughly 830,000 Saudis visited Egypt in 1996, compared to 768,000 in 1995.

SDF grant

IN AN attempt to encourage new engineering graduates to set up their own businesses, the Social Fund for Development recently signed an agreement with Cairo University's Faculty of Engineering. Under the terms of the agreement, interested young graduates would be provided with loans to launch their own enterprises, thereby allowing them to utilise their skills and experience in helping boost the nation's productivity.

The first project, with a capital of LE10 million, seeks to provide 425 job opportunities through the establishment of 58 new businesses. The young graduates selected for the programme will be required to repay only 93 per cent of the loan.

The second project, financed by an LE50,000 grant to the Faculty of Engineering, will be used to develop the entrepreneurial awareness and skills of graduates, as well as students in their final year of college.

Market report

GMI new year surge

THE GENERAL Market Index celebrated the new year with a 26.5 point increase to close at 314.2 for the week ending 2 January. Meanwhile the volume of transactions almost doubled to LE364.34 million compared to LE191 million the week before.

In line with the GMI, the index for the manufacturing sector registered a 19.15 point gain last week and settled at an even 356 points. Leading the sector was the Eastern Hoechst Company, whose shares increased by 55.5 per cent to close at LE14 per share, while those of the United Arab Spinning and Weaving Company (Unirab) gained LE19.5 to end at LE86.

The sale of 2.9 million shares of Ameriya Cement was the week's main event on the market. The transactions accounted for 66.38 per cent of the total market turnover in terms of number of shares traded. Moreover, it cornered 55.56 per cent of the total value of market transactions, as LE202.4 million-worth of its shares changed hands.

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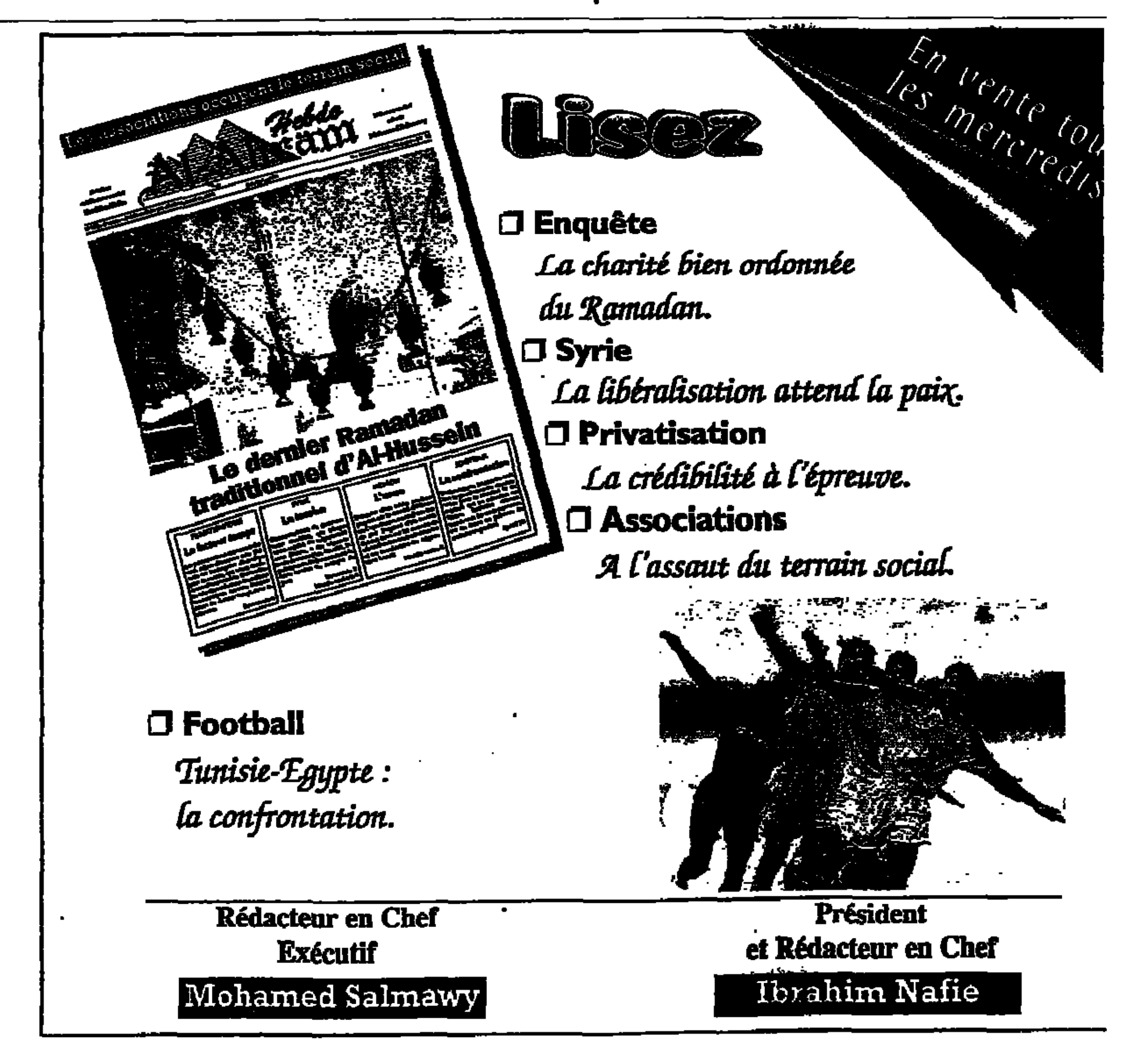
Construction companies also had a good week, with shares of the Heliopolis for Housing and Urbanisation gaining LE120 per share to close at LE550, while those of the Medinat Nasr Housing and Development Company registered an LE90 per share increase and closed at LE420.

On the financial sector, the Egyptian-American Bank (EAB) was the market's biggest winner, its shares increasing in value by nearly 60 per cent and closing at LE183.2. Shares of the Commercial International Bank brought in the new year with an LE104 per share jump, and closed at LE599.

No champagne corks were popping for the Middle East Land Reclamation Company, however, as its shares slipped in value by 15.73 per cent and closed at LE1.5.

In all, the shares of 49 companies increased in value, 24 decreased and 51 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram Weekly

Hebron hang-up

Politics and history have a way of putting in their place those who jump to the conclusion that the desire for peace is tantamount to its realisation. Only one week ago, the Hebron deal seemed hours away from being formalised. And the working assumption of those following the progress of the negotiations was that the parties involved would opt for seeing through to the end their commitments as a means of ensuring the regional stability and security so long sought after.

But instead of upholding Israel's commitments under the Oslo Accords to redeploy Israeli troops from West Bank villages on time, as a first step towards engaging in final status negotiations, Netanyahu has merged the two — making the final phase of the redeployment contingent on the outcome of the final talks. In so doing, he is essentially holding hostage the redeployment issue, with the ransom being more room to manoeuvre regarding issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return of Palestinian refugees and Palestinian sovereignty. However, since he has already rejected outright any form of compromise on these issues, would it then be safe to assume that the final redeployment, which he seeks to delay until 1999, will not materialise? In the name of Israeli security and the safety of the settlers, why not?

The game that the Israeli premier is playing is dangerous. To get elected, he solicited support from extremist elements which he now neither seems able or willing to reign in. Consequently, it is not the desire for peace that is driving these negotiations, but the desire to deconstruct it, as embodied by the religious right wing parties. No surprise, therefore, that Arafat rejected the terms of the compromise, or that it is back to the negotiating table for US peace coordinator Dennis Ross.

What Netanyahu and Ross have to keep in mind, however, is that should an agreement on Hebron not be reached, then the fundamental principals on which Oslo was built will be destroyed. A deal on Hebron would represent the trust and desire for cooperation that must drive the peace process. And, if this is not present, then neither shall the security that Israel seeks, nor the stability that the world would witness in this region.

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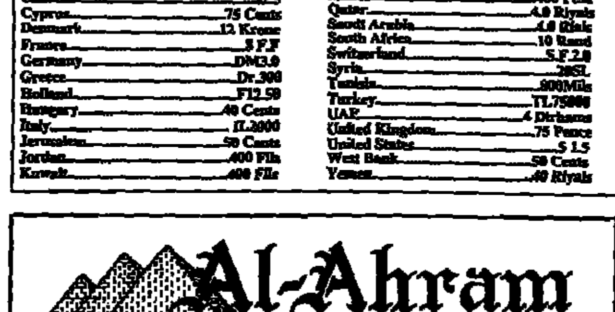
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Double standards, double speak

Disarmament? Fine, writes **Abdel-Gawad Sayed Emara** — but only if actions speak as loudly as words

During the past few years, with the demise of the bi-polar system and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US has, by means of threats and intimidation, consistently attempted to reinforce its hegemony. Concepts such as peace, war, disarmament and national security — the national security of others, of course — are treated with a cavalier pragmatism by the world's unchallenged superpower.

In exercising its dominance the US resorts to a number of strategies. In the case of Iraq it cloaked its own aims beneath an alliance of international forces, and regularly uses its control of international agencies or membership of the UN Security Council to lend legitimacy to its international adventures, played according to rules which Washington both concocts and changes according to its own needs.

Take, for example, the raid launched by Israel on an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1982. The reactor, which was under international surveillance by the International Agency for Nuclear Power, was geared towards the production of nuclear power. Yet neither the US, nor the international community at large, uttered a word condemning the Israeli act. The usual litany of high sounding phrases — non-aggression, respect of national sovereignty, the whole host of clichés that were poured out when Iraq invaded Kuwait, were nowhere to be heard. Nor did the US brand the raid on the reactor as an act of international terrorism, though Washington incessantly accuses Arab countries of such acts, accusations based, more often than not on the flimsiest of suspicions.

For the most blatant examples of double-standards, though, we should examine the history of disarmament. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, drawn up in 1968, clearly divided the world into the few, i.e. those countries that possessed nuclear weapons, and the majority of countries that did not. Britain, France, the US, China and former Soviet Union had an *ipso facto* right to nuclear weapons, while the rest of the world was expected to sign the treaty and accept this status quo. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, then, might be seen as the first attempt by the superpowers to legitimise their monopoly of nuclear weapons.

To examine the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty with regards to the Arab world is to further see the cynicism with which the notion of disarmament is manipulated within the international arena. Most informed estimates place Israel's holdings of nuclear warheads around the 200 mark. Yet the US has not once questioned Israel's rights to possess these weapons. Indeed, during President Hosni Mubarak's latest visit to the US in April of last year, President Clinton affirmed that any discussion of Israel's possession of nuclear arms should be deferred until after a peaceful settlement.

In 1994, during the discussions that preceded the ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Washington openly opposed the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East, clear evidence of its bias towards Israel, which was put under no pressure to sign the treaty.

American attitudes and actions concerning nuclear weapons in the Middle East are consistent only in as much as the US is determined to preserve Israel's regional monopoly. But such pragmatism and double standards are not the exclusive preserve of the US, nor are they restricted exclusively to nuclear issues. Take, for example, the media furore that accompanied allegations that Egypt had purchased Scud missiles with a range of 600km. Israel fed many stories to the international media expressing its concern over its national security, while at the same time merrily continuing with its programme to manufacture its own missiles with a range of 1,000km. At the same time Israel is continuing its programme to launch a series of spy satellites that will cover the whole of the Arab world. In all these projects, including the development of the Stinger missile, Israel receives the unequivocal backing of the Americans.

President Mubarak, in replying to the Israeli concerns which were given such prominence in the international media, pointed out that Egypt was perfectly within its rights to possess Scud missiles, and was not contravening any international laws. And such missiles could easily be decommissioned, providing, of course, that such disarmament was undertaken by the other countries of the region.

More recently the international community has expressed its concern over nuclear testing, drafting a treaty intended to ban such tests in the future. Yet once again the lofty ideals supposedly represented by disarmament are compromised by the manner of their application. The draft treaty, unsurprisingly, simply serves to reinforce the present position which is marred by inequality and discrimination. It seeks to reinforce the status quo, since it sanctions the possession of nuclear weapons by the five countries possessing the largest arsenals while seeking to prevent other countries from obtaining similar weapons. But the concerns of a country such as India, which insists that ratification of the treaty should be accompanied by a timetable by which the major powers will decommission the weapons they already possess, have been swept under the carpet.

Disarmament, it would seem, has nothing to do with creating a more equitable international order, based on equal rights, duties and security for all. It has everything to do with preserving the status quo. It is noteworthy here that both Egypt and Iran support the Indian viewpoint, while the great powers, led by the US, insist that the draft treaty should be ratified and presented before the UN General Assembly.

An ominous silence surrounded the most recent nuclear tests undertaken by France in the Pacific, at least on the part of Western countries. Certainly the US, and by extension NATO, realised the importance of the tests, since the results would allow France to develop the necessary technology to, in future, conduct nuclear experiments by model rather than actual explosions. And so the West turned a blind eye to the French detonation, secure in the knowledge that France could, after this last test, continue to develop its nuclear arsenal without having to resort to such empirical measures in the future. One more example, I think, of the cynicism which results from the West's unquestioning belief in its own right to dominate.

By now it should be clear that the US is perfectly happy to employ double standards in furthering its own aims, though, by a neat confusion of terms — usurpation of land, the right to liberate nations, armed struggle, terrorism, aggression, and the right to self defence — it seeks always to occupy, increasingly unconvincingly, the moral high ground. Unfortunately such double speak, and the double standards that accompany it, represent the main obstacle towards restructuring international affairs along more equitable lines.

The writer is a professor at the National Centre for Nuclear Safety and Radiation Control, and former head of the centre's Safety of Nuclear Facilities Department.

Education in the computer age

A lecture by Egypt's minister of education has launched a debate over the new vistas open to education in the age of the information revolution. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses some of the issues at stake

In a lecture delivered last November under the title "Education and New Frontiers" on the occasion of the cultural season of Alexandria University, Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin provided an insightful analysis of how education is likely to develop over the coming years. As the minister rightly pointed out, in the age of Internet and of information superhighways, the field of education is witnessing a veritable revolution with far-reaching implications for the very philosophy of education systems.

Particularly worthy of attention in this regard is a phenomenon best described as 'education by remote control'. Computers of the twenty-first century are expected to exhibit capabilities far beyond our wildest dreams. Scientists are already probing the possibility of building computers based on quantum physics, which will be millions of times faster than the most advanced electronic computer now existing. What is certain is that computers have opened new vistas for education. No longer will it be necessary to move to the place of learning, (the school, the college, the university), for it is education that will be brought to the home, thus creating an interactive relationship between teacher and student. No longer will towns be privileged with respect to the countryside; no longer will traffic bottlenecks stand as an obstacle to communication. Decentralisation will become education's most salient feature, not only at the level of towns and provinces, but even, via cable or satellite, at the national and global levels.

An important debate now underway in California's Silicon Valley, the world's most important centre for the manufacture and development of computers, is over whether priority should be given to small portable computers with all their appendages or to huge, powerful, immobile, central computers, with a wide range of extensions. Decentralisation can be achieved more economically with the latter option, because the computer's terminals can be connected to the most sophisticated computer technology without duplicating the cost for each terminal.

The age of computerised educational systems appears to be already upon us. One of Bill Clinton's main promises in his re-election campaign was that he would make the computer a compulsory tool of education in all the schoolrooms of America. With Germany said to be following suit, it will not be long before we see the spread of similar projects throughout the developed world. France and Germany are airing highly sophisticated educational programmes on their joint TV channel, *Arte*, along the lines of BBC television's prestigious *Open University*. So gripping are these programmes that I find it hard to tear myself away from my TV set when one of them is showing, even though my seventieth birthday is too close for me to act like an enthralled schoolboy.

The education revolution is bound to bring radical changes to the very quality of life. A citizen's life will no longer be divided into two distinct stages, a first stage of up to a quarter of a century given over to learning, and a second to working and earning a living. With increased life expectancy thanks to better medical care, a third, post-retirement, stage can be enjoyed by the majority of citizens. Distinctions between these periods will eventually disappear, and citizens will learn as they work and work as they learn, and continue to learn even after retiring.

This is a subject to which the noted contemporary French philosopher, Michel Serres, has devoted his attention in the recent years. One of the main advocates of the education revolution, he believes that as we stand on the threshold of a new millennium, we are for the first time contemplating an educational system that differs qualitatively from the one followed by the human race since the dawn of history. From the age of Greek civilisation up to the present day, education has been based on centralisation and on the physical displacement of the aspiring learner to the place of learning. Indeed, the whole system was geared to move in one direction, from student to teacher, instead of along a network made up of interactive parties using feedback to enrich and improve the educational process.

In short, communication today does not entail physical displacement or travel. Business people, academics, politicians, artists, indeed, any group of people interested in exchanging news and views, can now take part in seminars while remaining in different locations as far apart as, say, London, Tokyo, New York and Singapore. Travel will become a leisure activity for sightseeing and tourism rather than for work. All these developments will necessarily be reflected in the systems of education used throughout the world. These new systems cannot remain the prerogative of the developed world. At the same time, they cannot be made compatible with travesties such as witchcraft, sorcery, and other expressions of obscurantism and retrogression still prevalent in many underdeveloped countries, including those of the Arab world.

The computer revolution has also added a new form of duality between those who are computer-literate and those who are not. Still, the gap is not insurmountable. Computers develop so rapidly that they quickly become obsolete, causing prices to drop and creating the opportunity for less developed societies to purchase less costly variants which can eventually be upgraded by being connected to more advanced models.

Now that it is no longer limited to one stage of life, nor concentrated in given localities rather than others, education is freeing itself of the constraints of both time and space and is gradually becoming an integral part of our daily activities, whether in the field of work or pleasure. Also thanks to the computer, education can free itself of the notion that knowledge is the accumulation of data learned by rote, and identify itself rather with understanding mechanisms and processes, the hows and whys of phenomena. Moreover, computer memory can relieve human memory of much of the information it has to keep in store, thus offering better opportunities for imaginative and creative work.

There is no doubt that the minister's proposal to move the Egyptian educational system into the computer age will constitute a formidable task. But it will be no more formidable than generalising the use of electricity at the national level and ensuring that it reached the country's most remote corners. At a previous stage, electricity ensured the spread of light even at night; now it can ensure the spread of the light of knowledge on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

The New Valley

By Naguib Mahfouz

The New Valley project will most probably change the life of Egypt. I have followed its progress, and praised it frequently. I was slightly alarmed, however, when I heard of the problems the project might encounter, such as evaporation and seepage into the desert.

I have every confidence in the capacity of the authorities to deal with these problems, of which they are certainly aware. As the prime minister explained, this project is the result of years of intensive research and study, thus all potential problems will have been discussed and taken into consideration. Once accomplished, this project will be added to the list of the Egyptians' great achievements in taming the River Nile, such as the Qanater Barrage, the Aswan Dam and the High Dam.

Possibly the impact of the new project, which aims at extending the surface of arable land in Egypt, will supersede that of all the previous projects combined. Large tracts of desert land which have lain barren for centuries will bloom.

This project is being completed at a time when Egypt is expanding across the Suez Canal into Sinai, an expansion which will provide the Egyptian work force with hundreds of thousands of opportunities. I therefore call upon all young Egyptians to stall the brain drain, to stop seeking work abroad and to channel their energy instead into the New Valley, wherein lies the future.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Hebron massacres

Al-Akhbar: "The Palestinian people, who are facing the full range of extremist Israeli extremist repression, will not put up with this situation for long. They are ready for an uprising. The only way to avoid such an explosion is to proceed along the path of a just, even-handed and comprehensive peace. But this is something Netanyahu's government does not wish to comprehend. It is prepared to destroy everything by pursuing a policy which denies the Palestinians their rights in the belief that it is possible to turn back the wheels of history."
(Galal Dwidar, 5 January)

Al-Gomhuria: "The Israeli government should put the Qasba Souk incident in the right perspective — a danger signal as to what may happen if peace is frittered away — and not as a pretext to back the extremists who have declared their determination to assassinate peace. It is hoped that Netanyahu now believes that peace is an option worthy of betting on — the option that safeguards the interests of everyone."
(Editorial, 3 January)

Rose El-Youssef: "More than two years ago, we published the name of the Hebron massacre butcher who committed last week's crime, along with the names of six butchers belonging to the Kach movement in connection with the Ibrahim Mosque incident and said that they were preparing to kill more Palestinians and perpetrate more massacres. This observation is very important today, because Israeli butchers are not born overnight — it is a pattern of behaviour for a state and its citizens who do not stop destroying and always live in a state of war."
(Editorial, 6 January)

Al-Wafd: "The Israeli government claims that the massacres being perpetrated against Palestinians and Arabs in the Occupied Territories are the work of mentally disturbed Israelis... The truth is that the perpetrators of these crimes are not mentally disturbed. They are fully aware of what they are doing. The mental disturbance that exists is in the minds of the rulers of Israel who usurp rights, plan massacres, build settlements and ignore international documents and agreements."
(Editorial, 3 January)

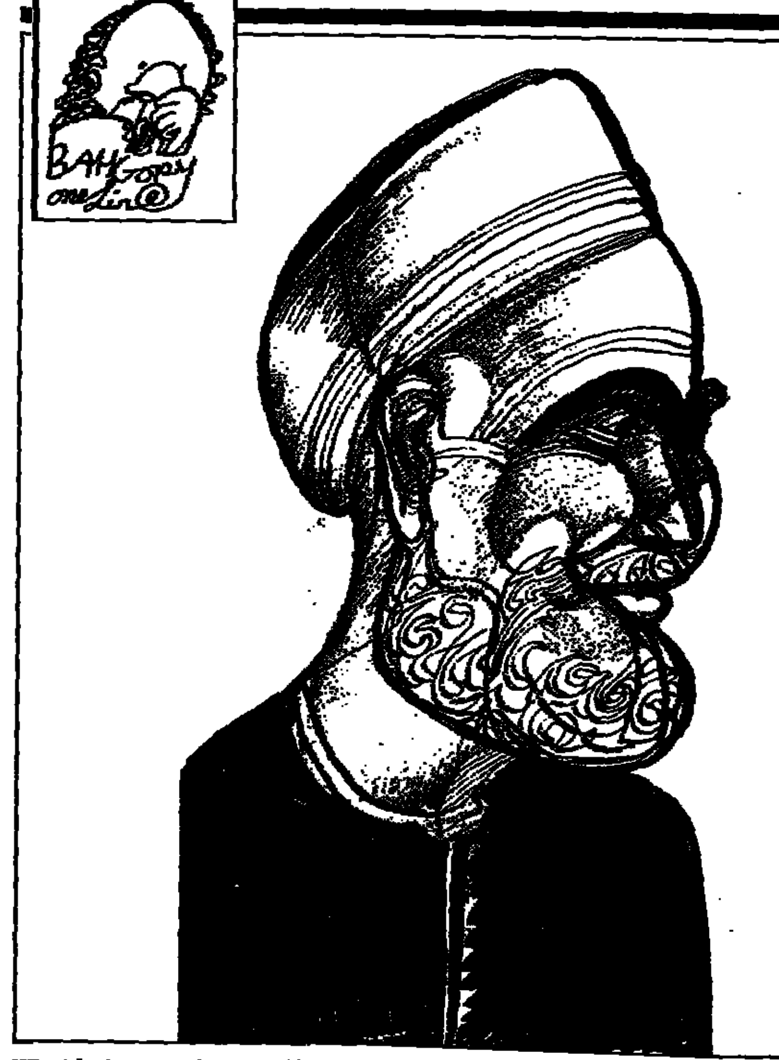
Al-Ahram: "Despite the diversity of cultures and values the world over, there is one interpretation of the word 'heroism'. In short heroism means standing for good in its eternal struggle with evil... But in Israel this is not so. In Israel, we find those who consider the Hebron massacre killer as a hero in the same way that the Ibrahim massacre killer is also a hero. It seems that heroism to the Israeli extremists is limited to killing Arabs and exterminating them. This sick racist culture is definitely responsible for the twisted meaning of heroism."
(Ahmed Bahgat, 4 January)

Al-Shaab: "The Hebron accord has created a new divided Berlin in the West Bank, the greater part of which is in Zionist hands. Perhaps it is a blueprint for another Berlin in Jerusalem! The danger of Palestinian concessions in Hebron is that they have ended the unity of Hebron as an Islamic Arab city and given legal and political status to Jewish settlement in the heart of the city. More dangerous, they will open the door to inevitable massacres between the Palestinians and the Zionists."
(Editorial, 3 January)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The worst thing about the Hebron incident is that it signals a new phase in which Israel wishes to dictate what it wants by force. The Hebron agreement will not be signed except through new Palestinian concessions, with Israel reneging on its commitment under the Oslo Accord. Netanyahu has refused to be tied to any timetable to implement the postponed redeployment and the settlements programme continues, while threats against Syria continue and aggression is not unlikely. And the US mediator — particularly with its new administration — will continue to bloster its alliance with Israel in all fields while offering the Arabs only more pressures to get more concessions."
(Galal Aref, 4 January)

Al-Mussawar: "The difficult circumstances which await the peace process in 1997 will make it necessary for Egypt to wage a series of battles against the insistence of the Likud government to impose its hegemony over the West Bank. Any improvement in Egyptian-Israeli relations which may come about as a result of the Hebron agreement will therefore be temporary as Binyamin Netanyahu will do his best to prevent the Israeli army from withdrawing from the rest of the West Bank and will launch his ferocious campaign to encourage more settlements in it."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 3 January)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



What better symbol of religious tolerance, on the eve of the month of Ramadan, than the Sheikh of Al-Azhar Dr Mohamed Sayed Tantawi? In delineating his features I have attempted to incorporate elements drawn from the faces of his illustrious predecessors, including, of course, the great reformer and enlightenment champion Mohamed Abdou.

هكذا من الأصل

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Survey swindle

Opinion polls are based on scientific principles elaborated by several disciplines: statistics, data analysis, psychology and sociology. In recent years, they have become one of the most widely used methods of measuring public opinion trends and stands on policies and issues which happen to be of importance to the community, or of evaluating support of, or opposition to, political, economic or social orientations among a given segment of the community. The results of these polls inform the adoption of programmes, the evaluation of priorities and the estimation of likely results in electoral campaigns.

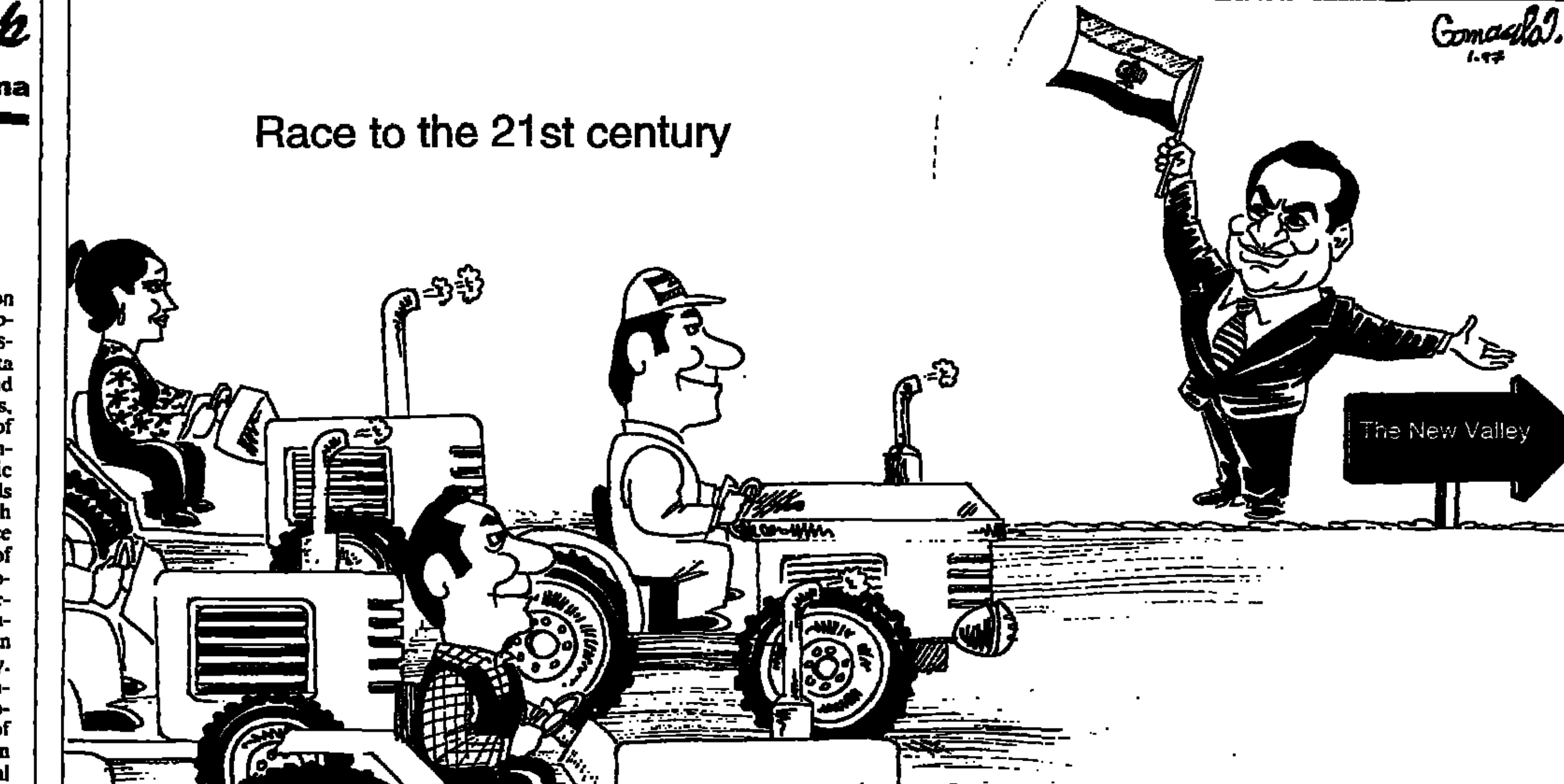
Opinion polls depend largely on the sample chosen, a process carried out according to specific criteria. The sample must be as representative as possible of the target community. The choice of the sample and the distribution of questionnaires, for instance, are the responsibility of independent and reputable firms run by staff specialised in numerous fields. The cost of carrying out an opinion poll can be astronomical.

That is why the sudden deluge of reports which certain dubious marketing and information centres have recently released is astonishing, not to say incomprehensible. Dozens of reports are being circulated for no apparent reason, and reveal nothing but praise for, and enthusiastic devotion to, ministers and other leading officials, journalists and artists, as well as a variety of newspapers, magazines and other publications.

This sudden flood leads one to doubt the validity of opinion polls, which are not renowned for their meticulous implementation in the Arab world, with the exception of certain rare instances, such as the poll conducted in 1994 by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, under the supervision of Dr Nader Fergani of Al-Mishkat Research Centre, on the opinion of Egyptians regarding certain local and regional political issues.

A poll the results of which are currently being announced in rapid succession, somewhat like the results of a lottery, is allegedly based on a sample of three million people from all over the Arab world, a number never before attained by any respectable poll anywhere. The results of this poll can be summed up by sound-bites: so-and-so is the best political personality or parliamentarian or journalist, or the best-known female politician. The results, in other words, mean nothing. They reveal nothing new about public opinion, but they have done a good deal to falsify common perceptions and deceive people through naive and demagogic methods.

It is of course natural for anyone to feel pleased and *self-satisfied* when described as an astounding genius by one of these bogus centres. One would like to think, however, that leading public officials and prominent personalities, who are admired and respected for their services to their country and communities, were above these petty, spurious reports. Nor should the media stoop to these levels of deception and debasement of the public's mind, especially in light of the fact that statisticians have spoken out against these centres, affirming that they damage the reputation of impartial scientific polls. They can be compared to the dubious organisations and universities that distribute doctoral degrees and other diplomas — in return for a donation, of course.



Soapbox

Defying nature

Two major civil engineering projects have changed Egypt's geographical features in modern times. The Suez Canal enhanced the importance of Egypt's geographical centrality; the construction of the High Dam produced profound changes in the southern part of the river valley, providing vast quantities of water and increasing the country's resources. The dam's full impact on environment and climate has yet to be fully understood.

Egypt's map has been changed further during the past two decades. A vigorous urbanisation movement has led to the creation of around twenty cities or new settlements linked to industrial areas.

Within this context, it is only normal that Egyptians should nurture the ambition for another rebellion against the constraints of geography. The idea is basically to break free from the confines of the ancient Nile Valley, to develop the large expanses of desert to the east and west of the river.

Egypt has established an economic infrastructure, carried out financial and monetary reforms, and adopted technologies which improve and accelerate production while requiring less physical effort. The flourishing private sector is able to undertake vast agricultural projects. Finally, Egypt is able today, for the first time in its modern history, to focus fully on sustained domestic development.

For all these reasons, President Mubarak, as well as all Egyptians, feels that expanding into the desert is the right project for Egypt as it moves into the coming century.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram's Al-Siassa Al-Dawlia *(International Politics) quarterly journal.*

Osama El-Ghazali Harb

Israel and the Egyptian left

The debate on relations with Israel, begun by Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, continues. Given the historical experience of the Egyptian left, writes Ibrahim Fathi, ending the boycott can only result in isolation

According to Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, the Egyptian left's rejection of normalisation with Israel is as ardent as a religious belief ("Boycott and the left", *Al-Ahram Weekly, 17-23 October, 1996)*. This attitude, he suggests, emanates from the paradox inherent in a left that has been Arab nationalist rather than internationalist (the presumed ideological outlook of every left wing movement) in orientation. The Egyptian left does not seek peace between Egypt and Israel as it should, according to him, if it were consistent with the slogan of world peace it declares.

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed attempts to trace the origins of this paradox back to the Jewish origins of the Egyptian communist movement. He argues that the foreign or Egyptianised Jewish upper-middle class intellectuals who founded communist organisations, theoretically to defend the working class, did so for reasons pertaining to their interests as Jews during that period.

This view, however, is a sweeping generalisation. The majority of the Jews in question barely spoke Arabic and were largely isolated from mass political activity. They would have been incapable of establishing organisations beyond small circles of foreign language-speaking intellectuals, primarily upper class in origin, whereas some of the communist organisations operating in the forties were to a certain extent mass-oriented.

The idea of a handful of Jews who had begun at zero does not adequately explain a reality which was far more complex. A reactionary royalist press and anti-communist agencies described Jewish millionaire Henry Curiel as the head of a communist conspiracy, controlled and financed from abroad, and plotting to overthrow the government, but this was clearly part of a concerted campaign to stigmatise the left and the nationalist movement in general. Among those arrested in the massive crackdown on communists on 11 July 1946 were a hundred nationalist democrats, including Salama Moussa, Mohamed Zaki Abdel-Qader and Mohamed Mandour. Only five of those arrested belonged to Curiel's organisation.

Egypt in the forties was not devoid of political and intellectual communist activity totally independent of Curiel and the Jews in general. Throughout the thirties, the Egyptian press reported that members of communist cells had been arrested in Mahalla El-Kobra, Assiut and Alexandria. Even after it was legally banned, shortly after its establishment in the early twenties, the Egyptian Communist Party continued to be represented through prominent figures in the labour syndicates and intellectuals who disseminated their ideas in books and articles. The police suppression instigated by the British colonial authorities splintered the party, ruptured its organisational structure and resulted in erratic tactics.

European or Egyptianised Jews were hardly the founders of the Egyptian communist movement, nor were they instrumental in developing a programme that would adapt Marxist thought to the Egyptian environment. They played no direct role in linking radical consciousness to the mass movement. As they themselves confirm, on the other hand, Jewish "leaders" were able to exploit the fact that, since they were militating against the Germans, the British colonial authorities tolerated their activities in a time of war. Meanwhile, police suppression of the popular Egyptian labour and democratic left remained relentless, with the arrest, for example, of fifty members of the left-wing "Bread and Freedom" group. Some Marxist or pseudo-Marxist Jews were thus in a position to rally elements of a shattered left, rapidly gain positions of leadership and consolidate the organisations, although at no time did the conflict over the Egyptianisation of the movement abate.

In addition, Jewish Marxists in Egypt did not form a single homogeneous bloc. Indeed, there were great differences among them. A small number allied themselves with the Egyptian national movement and the syndicates, opting to remain in Egypt in spite of the risk of imprisonment and other forms of harassment. They also supported the Arab position on Palestine and opposed the decision to partition the state, even after the Soviet Union had backed this decision. This group of Jewish Marxists, who belonged to the Fagr Gedid ("New Dawn") organisation, continued to accuse Curiel and his followers of being Zionists.

Another group of Jews in Egypt established the Israeli League against Zionism in 1946. Henri Curiel's papers reveal his opposition to this league, which was dissolved by Prime Minister Nuqrashi the following year. The league issued a tract stating its opposition to the congregation of Jews in Palestine for the purpose of founding a Jewish state which would act as a colonial spearhead against the Arab peoples. Curiel, on the other hand, felt that the early Jewish settlers in Palestine constituted an elite nation — although he never published this view in Arabic.

The Egyptian communist movement has never been fully exonerated from a stigma which is often portrayed as its "original sin" — to wit, that it was founded by Jews. On 26 April 1947, the pro-Wafd *Sawt El-Umma* ("The Nation's Voice") reported fights in the Jewish clubs between Zionists and communists, shouting "down with Zionism", who were then arrested. Yet the fact remains that only a very few Jews did join the left, which never really offered them any advantage in their campaign against racism and anti-semitism and in support of a specifically Jewish identity. On the contrary, the ideology of the left advocated the assimilation of Jews into their native countries and drew a sharp distinction between Judaism as a religion and as a form of nationalism. The left vehemently rejected the latter.

Sid-Ahmed asserts that the elimination of Jewish leaders from the Egyptian communist movement after the creation of Israel, along with this state's increasing hostility, generated a climate hospitable to the Nasser regime's pan-Arab precepts and to the left's renunciation of its internationalist principles. The premises upon which this statement is predicated, in fact, do not accurately reflect the circumstances of the left-wing movement at the time. Its "leadership" was not predominantly Jewish, even before the decision to purge it. Indeed, had it not been predominantly Egyptian, such a decision could never have been taken. This decision and others like it were strongly influenced by the position of the Syrian Communist Party, which had spearheaded the Arab communist movement. In Syria at the time, Jews were not only eliminated from leadership positions, they were banned from membership altogether. Unlike its Egyptian counterpart, the Syrian Communist Party had not committed the "original sin." In Egypt, the decision, which only affected a small handful of individuals, was a response to the political mood of the Arab masses, generated by the Tripartite Aggression in which Israel played a prominent role.

Of greater significance in Sid-Ahmed's argument, however, is the absolute dichotomy he posits throughout between pan-Arabism and internationalism. The fact is that pan-Arab nationalism was an exigency for the Palestinian communists who had been closely connected with their Egyptian comrades since the twenties. Maher Sherif's *Communism and the Question of Arab Nationalism in Palestine: 1919-1948* provides documents corroborating this assertion. On page 26, the author cites a document indicating that the Palestinian communists believed that British imperialism aimed primarily at using its occupation of Palestine, which lies at the geographical and historical centre of the Arab world, to prevent the Arab peoples from achieving any effective unification. The document dates from May 1924, obviously long before the advent of Nasserism.

Such early documents reveal attempts to transform the anti-Zionist movement into a universal pan Arab nationalist movement. A document from 1929 states explicitly that international unity between the Arab and Jewish proletariats could not be achieved in the absence of a common struggle against the Zionist settlers. All peaceful slogans disguising the true nature of the struggle, it was believed, would ultimately deepen the animosity between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. The Palestinian Communist Party's tract further warned neighbouring Arab countries against the perils of future Zionist expansion beyond the borders of Palestine. Most party leaders in Palestine were internationalist Jews.

Another document, dating from June 1937, traces the evolution of the Palestinian national movement. "The Arab revolutionary movement and Zionism in Palestine", as the document is titled, states that the Palestinian national movement is part of the general Arab nationalist movement which embodies the Arab liberation movement's goal: unifying the Arab world and liberating the Arabs from the yoke of imperialism, thus leading to the formation of a single, independent nation. Zionist settlement in Palestine, according to this document, aimed at breaking the link uniting the Arab countries and at destroying the Arab liberation movements.

The internationalists who published these documents believed that their ideas could be embodied in the collective action of progressive Arabs and Jews inside Palestine. They appealed to Jewish workers in the hope that they would rally to the struggle against the Zionist invasion and British colonial policy. To the communists, the nationalist movement's fight to liberate Palestine from imperialism would guarantee the Jewish masses their full rights.

There were strong bonds between the Palestinian and Egyptian communist parties, as I mentioned above. In fact, several Egyptians (among them Shaaban Hafez and Mahmoud Duwidar) worked in the ranks of the Palestinian Communist Party itself. Arab nationalist ideology (in its democratic rather than its totalitarian orientation) was by no means alien to Arab communists. In spite of their failures, they did not borrow from Nasserism. As early as July 1923, the international movement had to contend with a predicament central to the desired unity of Arab and Jewish workers. This involved the discrepancy between the fate of Jewish workers as members of the exploited proletariat and their position as part of the Zionist immigration movement through which they could garner privileges within the context of the settlement enterprise. The Third International's condition for recognition of the Palestinian Communist Party, of which Jewish members made up a relatively large part, was that it must provide all possible forms of support to the Arab liberation movement in Palestine in its struggle against Zionist and British occupation.

The migration of Jewish labour, however, was an integral part of the Zionist settlement drive, which expanded to the direct detriment of the Arab rural proletariat, coerced into forfeiting their land. Not only was the Jewish labour movement in Palestine indelibly marked by Zionism, its interests were intrinsically bound with those of the Zionist bourgeoisie and inimical to those of the Arab peasantry. The establishment of settlements and other Jewish enterprises funded by Jewish capital could not take place without the transfer of Arab property into Jewish hands and the complete dispossession of Arab labourers. Jewish workers also served in the police forces recruited by the Zionist settlers to intimidate, beat and kill Arab workers and peasants.

"Workers of the world, unite!" did not automatically include the Arab and Zionist labour movements. Hence the need for the directives issued by the Third International with regard to the Arab liberation movement. The primary focus of the left in general has always been against the forces of international capitalism and imperialism. Nationalism was not treated in the abstract in terms of formal theory or absolute rights, but rather in terms of the contribution of national liberation movements to the struggle against the enemies of the left.

Nationalism can take on many guises. There are reactionary nationalist movements such as that of late 19th-century Czechoslovakia, which supported Tsarist Russia. Nationalist movements can also be progressive, as is the case of the Arab nationalist anti-imperialist movement. Internationalism is not by definition a non-nationalist, cosmopolitan orientation. It relies on the revolutionary impetus of the nationalist struggle waged by the oppressed against colonialism. Therefore, there is no *inherent contradiction between internationalism and progressive nationalism*. Nor is it possible to equate Arab nationalism, directed against international capitalist imperialism, with Zionist nationalism, which implements the policies of a colonial power. The solidarity of the working class throughout the world with the struggle for national independence is the basis of internationalism as it has been understood historically by the Arab left.

With the creation of the state of Israel comes the question of peace. History has demonstrated that aggressive expansionism is intrinsic to the Zionist state. It is not an expedient implemented by a certain government that can be voted out in the following election season, or a policy that can be reversed by raising the consciousness of the Jewish "masses". Israel has always worn a peaceful mask, appealing for the Arabs to end their boycott and join it around the negotiating table as it persisted in annexing still more land and exercising the arrogance of power. In Israeli anthems, the territory seized through armed aggression is an integral part of Israel's cherished borders.

An isolated circle among the Egyptian left existed that called itself "The Egyptian Preliminary Committee of Peace Advocates" and had Youssef Helmi as its secretary-general. This group failed to perceive the expansionist, colonialist character of the Israeli state and its function as a cornerstone of international imperial aggression, its role in promoting the arms race and Western strategic alliances, its repeated efforts to undermine national liberation movements and to contain the socialist camp. Youssef Helmi and his friends in Israel who supported Henri Curiel never saw beyond the state of war that existed across the borders between the two countries. Israel, to them, was never a dangerous adversary, the battering ram for US and international colonial aggression in the region. On the contrary, they thought that animosity toward Israel was a conspiracy fostered to distract attention from colonialism.

In a well-known letter, addressed to Nasser and published in November 1955, Helmi wrote that the organs and agents of colonialism sought to instil in the Egyptian public opinion hatred and suspicion of Israel and to excite similar antipathies inside Israel in order to keep tension alive, to eliminate any possibility of achieving a just peace with Israel and resolving the issue peacefully. He wrote that everyone who said that Israel should be driven into the sea deserved to be "beaten to death". When Helmi wrote this letter, sending a similar one to Israel, Israel had invaded Gaza twice and killed Egyptian soldiers. Shortly afterwards it would take participate in the Tripartite Aggression.

Contrary to Helmi's thinking, "colonialism" was not a means of sowing discord between peace-loving Arabs and Israelis. President Eisenhower's memoirs demonstrate that the US was set on achieving peace in the Middle East. Eisenhower thought he could purchase this peace by financing the High Dam. Nasser rebuffed these overtures, made in 1955. He was unwilling to barter Egypt's sovereignty for the illusion of peace with Israel. Consequently, it was only logical that the left should oppose all moves toward peace with a colonial implant in the region.

A lone voice has continued to echo Youssef Helmi's appeal until today, even after Camp David and the fall of the socialist bloc. Before the October War, it was the only voice rejecting the use of arms to regain the Sinai. The forces of world peace would solve the issue through peaceful negotiations, it argued. Today, it is guided by a new compass. International capitalism is renovating itself, it holds. Capitalism today offers the only hope for improving the standard of living of the working class and the people of the South. They in turn should seek assimilation into the international capitalist system, which only has the very best intentions. The compass points to peace with Israel. Clearly, however, the arrow is not pointing left at all; it is pointing right, resolutely.

Can the Egyptian left seek to refute its history? Should it seek selective normalisation with the predominantly Zionist Israeli left? The boycott against Israel is a powerful weapon. To blunt it would be detrimental to the Arab cause. The Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions has refused to normalise relations with the Histadrut. Is the Egyptian left expected to cut itself off from the working class and rally to the call for normalisation in the name of a deceptive internationalism? Most of the Egyptian syndicate movement, to which many Egyptian intellectuals are affiliated, has rejected normalisation. Should the left sever itself from the Egyptian people, only to become the object of popular contempt?

Proponents of peace in Israel are diverse in their political orientations. A considerable segment of the Israeli "left" espouses the current "peace process" as it is being conducted at present. Not only is the left closely linked to the Israeli right, its best voices are weak and isolated. But even to seek a form of selective normalisation would be counter-productive. It would pave the way for a rejection of the boycott by any interested party, destroying one of the Palestinians' most powerful weapons and, ultimately, playing into the hands of the Israeli right. Were the Egyptian left to "normalise" relations with the proponents of peace in Israel, it would only alienate itself from the majority of the Egyptian people.

The writer is a literary critic and left-wing theorist with numerous writings on the Egyptian communist movement.

To The Editor

Opinion sought

Sir- After reading the letter of Mr Webb of the British Embassy in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 19-25 December 1996 ("Suez allegations"), I would like to know your opinion about the truthfulness of the story of Mr Mohamed Mahran Othman, which you published in the *Weekly*'s Suez supplement (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 7-13 November 1996).

Paolo Lombardini
Zamalek

First, some background to Mr Lombardini's letter. Our special supplement commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Suez War, referred to in the letter, included an article in which Mohamed Mahran Othman, a veteran of that war, currently the curator of the Port Said Museum, gave his personal account of his part in the war, including his capture by the British invasion forces. In an earlier letter, Mr Lombardini questioned Othman's claim that upon his capture he was flown to Cyprus, where British doctors removed his corneas as brutal punishment for having caused a British soldier to lose his sight while Othman was resisting the invasion. Irrespective of Othman's personal account, we are sure of the following facts: 1- Othman took part in the armed resistance against the invasion; 2- he was captured by the British invasion forces; 3- he lost his eyesight after his capture. Of course, we only have Othman's story of the way in which he lost his sight.

The brutality of the tripartite aggression, however, is attested to by much more than Othman's story, as the supplement referred to amply demonstrated. We doubt, furthermore, that acts as horrifically brutal as that described by Othman are ever put on record, or released if they have been. Solid evidence to support or refute Othman's story may never be found.

In all cases, we are grateful to both Mr Lombardini and the British Embassy for their responses.

The Editor

New Year's wish

Sir- In reference to the article entitled "Looking in at ourselves" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 December-2 January): Hassan Hanafi is quite right when he says that change must come first from within. This is my New Year's prayer.

Change cannot occur in the absence of freedom of thought and expression. Everyone has the right to think, to differ and to express his thoughts and feelings. Freedom and democracy are two sides of the same coin. A free individual is one who lives in a democratic society. Unless democracy prevails, a monopoly over thought takes place.

Culture, tolerance, and enlightenment are tools which society cannot do without if it is to achieve welfare and prosperity. Excomunication — charges of apostasy — exclusion and denial of others are social diseases, a destructive force which eventually destroys both individuals and society. Nothing can be achieved unless internal harmony is established. Individuals, groups and organisations cannot be on good terms with each other if freedom is butchered.

It is my most ardent wish for 1997 that democracy be consolidated. May intellectual awareness prevail. Only thus will intellectual terrorism end.

Zarif Kamel Hakim
English language teacher
El-Daher Secondary School for Girls



Christof Fleischer and Uta Eckhardt in Tagträumer Theatre Company's reading of *Midaq Alley*. Below, director Veronika Brendel meets the author

Beyond the cul-de-sac

As the inhabitants of Midaq Alley take to the stage in Frankfurt, German audiences are entranced, writes Mohamed Issa El-Sharqawi

Ever since Naguib Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, the German reading public has shown an increasing interest in Arabic literature in general and the works of Naguib Mahfouz in particular. Most of his major novels have now been translated into German, while shorter pieces of his fiction regularly appear in Germany's literary magazines.

Certainly over the past decade or so non-Western literatures appear to have been in vogue. Last October, at the Frankfurt International Book Fair — Europe's leading trade event — Mario Vargas Llosa received the prize of the German Publisher's Union, and translations of his works regularly form the central items in the shop window displays of major book shops.

Naguib Mahfouz, of course, comes high in the roll call of non-European writers in demand in Germany. His novels, perceived as a comprehensive portrayal of the cultural, social and political life of 20th century Egypt, are widely read, particularly the Cairo trilogy, originally published between 1956-57.

The three novels that comprise Mahfouz's trilogy appear to have a particular appeal for Germans, perhaps because in this novel sequence they find echoes of the family saga popularised in German literature with the publication, in 1901, of Thomas Mann's first novel, *Buddenbrooks*. Mann, incidentally, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1926 and *Buddenbrooks* was itself translated into Arabic in the early 1960s.

Mahfouz, like Mann, transforms an intense focus on details into a literature that transcends the specifics of place and acquires a universal resonance. *Midaq Alley* can, in many ways, serve as a model for this process. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was *Midaq Alley* — first published in 1947 — among all of Mahfouz's novels, that the Tagträumer Theatre Company chose when they were looking for a Mahfouz text on which to base a staged reading to present to German public.

But why, exactly, would a German theatre company chose to stage a reading of an Egyptian novel? This was the question I asked Christof Fleischer, artistic director of Tagträumer, and one of the participants in the staged reading, playing the role of Abbas El-Helw.

"*Midaq Alley*," Fleischer insists, "was chosen because it portrays Egypt during a period of decisive transformation, when even the most obscure of Cairo's alleyways reverberated with the events of World War II."

It is a pity that neither Fleischer, nor the director of the reading, Veronika Brendel, have read Ghali Shoukri's insightful essay on the novel, published in *El-Muntami*.

"From a tiny alleyway in one of the popular quarters of Cairo," writes Shoukri, "indeed, from the only coffee shop in that alley, the vision of the artist reaches out to embrace the flux of history."

"The alleyway," Shoukri continues, "serves Mahfouz as a springboard from which he launches into a profound examination of the Egyptian condition. For Mahfouz the alleyway serves as a microcosm of human experience."

The direction of Mahfouz's literary trajectory — from alley outwards, eventually encompassing an entire universe — is what initially attracted the director and actors to the idea of a staged reading of *Die Midaq-gasse*, the title under which the novel appeared in German translation. Preparations for the performance included a visit to Cairo in 1994, when the troupe spent a great deal of time exploring the alleyways of Gamaliya, drinking in the atmosphere and familiarising themselves with traditional Egyptian manners and customs, before meeting with Mahfouz himself. And this attention to background details, perhaps as meticulous as that paid by the novelist himself, allowed for a most convincing rendition of the text when it was eventually performed to German audiences in Frankfurt.

Music

Heaven's best for wonder

David Blake meets the man without a shadow

New Year's Eve Concert; Cairo Symphony Orchestra; soprano soloist Edina Kovacs; conductor Ahmed El-Saedi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 31 December

Don't talk to me of shadows because I belong in the sun says the music of Johann Baptist Strauss. Born at the start of the 19th century, dying on the eve of its last gasp, he whirled through Europe — clad in bright, striped silk pyjamas — through two suicidal wars, without turning either a hair or making the smallest change to the colour or the classy quality of his music.

As music, it is not adaptable. It just stands there — elegant, perfectly clothed — and whirls off. The rest was once called happiness. But whatever it really is, Strauss goes on forever, without a cloud or the slightest trepidation. His confidence is supreme. The greatest conductors adore him. No one ever questions his quality. He's the man without a shadow. And the entire human race, so it seems, responds to the azure blue 1, 2, 3, which means naturally *The Blue Danube*, which of course is dark grey. Was it ever blue? But it will remain always clear azure when Strauss begins his waltz.

The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, the Cairo Opera and the Austrian Embassy in Cairo go into a yearly clinch and deliver a sort of repro of what has become a national event in Vienna — the New Year's Eve ball, which naturally dances around Strauss.

Themes and lights: it has caught even the ear of stay-horizontal-Cairo. The Main Hall, usually sparsely filled for the best classics and contemporary music, burst its seams for Strauss. Cairenes, as well as expatriates, filled the Main Hall — clapping, dancing and positively wallowing in happy Strauss's musical 3/4 life.

This 1996 event surpassed all others in class and high spirits. It was a bash of a ball. The crowd went down to the proscenium, and at the end refused to leave, positively thumping the stage for just one more "Acceleration Waltz". El-Saedi and the orchestra, delighted, gave it to them.

The concert began with the overture to *Die Fledermaus*, then the *Wiener Blut* waltz. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra is enjoying a bright period at present, and this night was one of the brightest. Throughout an evening full of waltzes, galoppes, polkas and czardas — tunes so well known El-Saedi had them produce fine-spun, airy, dazzlingly bright-coloured sound, different for each celebrated melody — there were no bumps or flat-footed slogging. He and the orchestra gave it all newly minted.

We have, after all, heard it all before, but seldom in a style like this. Some of the softly shining effects took the playing to heights to which the orchestra seldom aspires.

Mein Herr Marquis, Adele's rosy little ditty from *Fledermaus*, introduced the singer of the night, Edina Kovacs from the Budapest Opera. Tall and beautiful, she has a very high *sfogato* voice — a Mozart singer. Kovacs looks like a good actress. She began rather pale and nervous, but improved as the night went on. After more songs and a beautifully played *Annen Polka* from the orchestra, came the *Vilja Lied* from *The Merry Widow*. This was her only failure of the evening. She just didn't know how to sing it. El-Saedi carefully drew from the orchestra waves of wonderful sound, exactly in the right tempo, to support her. And she let the whole thing down. Four local home team singers do it properly, so how can this singer, from the very heartland of *Widow* territory not know how to catch the mood and heat of this globally loved tune?

The *Kaiser Waltz* opening was given perfect pianissimo which allowed the loveliest of Strauss melodies to weave spells, stealing through the Opera House. Something fresh, green and airy, like walking in the Semmering — no orchestral party could ask for more. The second part of the celebration included Lehar and Kalman. This first composer lets in a little of the shadow that crept about the background of the 19th century as it began to give way to the 20th. Strauss always stayed in the sun, but the crowds were gathering fast.

Kovacs came again, singing from Lehar's operetta *The Lark*, which moved her closer to her native Hungary. And the voice took on quite a different turn. Her hold on the music was complete, she swung into the high parts and lunged down into the depths. And the entire personality brightened. She was on home ground. Each song of Kovacs' was done in a different dress. Before each entrance, the audience was making bets on which colour would come next. We had been into dark blue, emerald green, deep red (black gloved) and pale blue. Other colours were to come.



Edina Kovacs

El-Saedi, in the *Bandit Galopp*, let the orchestra off the leash. And we moved into real "Schrammel Musik" — the sounds that emerged from the wine bars and drinking houses of Vienna. It lunges about to begin in gorgeous zigeuner tunes, then spins off, with the fiddles flying into sounds like spinning tops. All the evening the strings were clear and let themselves go into the New Year frolic.

Kovacs had gone into pale blue for songs from the *Queen of Czardas*. For Kalman another colour, pembe, the name the Turks gave to a shade otherwise indescribable. Neither blue nor mauve, highlighted and powerful, matadors wear capes of it. After this Hungarian song and the *Trish Trash Polka*, came the *Danube* and, lastly, the *Rodetski March*. So the ritual of goodbye to 1996 began.

Football clapping and stamping, Kovacs dancing a *Czardas* dance. And so another year passed away. Strange for Strauss and time passing, stranger for memory to wreak its vengeance on survivors. This rather fragile music had seen more ends than beginnings. The Hapsburg Empire gone, Europe itself almost unrecognisable, let 'em eat cake and dance the waltz. But mind the blood on the ballroom floor and the stains on the aubusson tapestries. Death and catastrophe everywhere, but the waltz remains — a steely, frail survivor of the hideous paradoxes of the human spirit. Another year in which to uncover the eternal promises of a happy New Year.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Art Fair
Dania Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gan-ish St, across Mohamed Mahmoud St, Doctors' Tower, no 405. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-9pm. Until 9 Jan.

Collective Exhibition
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily 10.30am-3pm & 4pm-8.30pm. Until 9 Jan.
Featuring works by Amany Mahdy, Samir Shawki, Shamseddin El-Koronfily, Omar Abdel-Zaher, among others.

Esmat Dawestashi (Paintings & Sculptures)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, off Tahrir Sq. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 16 Jan.

Susan Osgood (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 21 Jan.

Constantin Xenakis
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 355 1871. Daily 10am-9pm. 5-30 Jan.
Retrospective exhibition (1958-1996).

Ramadaniat
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 8pm-10pm. 8 Jan-8Feb.
Exhibiting the works of Omar El-Nagdi, along with Mostafa Kamal, Ibrahim Abdel-Malek, Ivon Ezzat and Fares Ahmed Fares.

Sixth Cairo International Biennale
Cairo Opera Gallery, second floor, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0592. Daily 10am-8pm. Until 15 March.
This year's Biennale has received a luke warm critical reception. Make up your own mind.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose *Egypt Awakening* became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

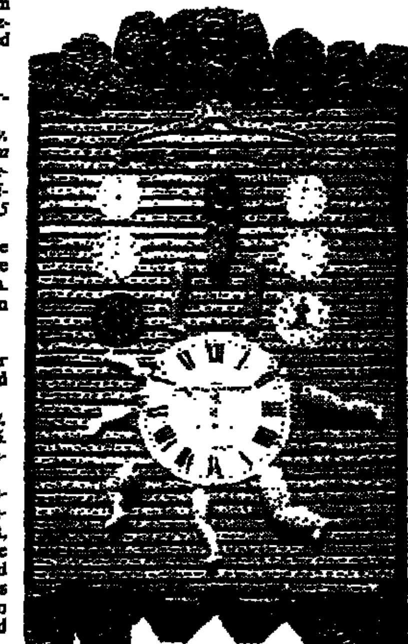
FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 9 Jan, 8pm.
Belle de Jour (1966) Directed by Luis Bunuel, starring Catherine Deneuve, Jean Sorel, Michel Piccoli, Genevieve Page and Francis Blanche.
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 12 Jan, 7pm.
Ma Nuit Chez Maud (1969) Directed by Eric Rohmer, starring Jean-Louis Trintignant, Marie-Christine Barrault, Antoine Vitez and Françoise Fabien.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

El-Jentel (The Gentleman)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.3pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, Poussi and Elham Shahin play it for laughs.

Elaqat Mashbouha (Illicit Liaisons)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.
With Samir Sabri and Jala Fahmy. Need we say more?



Esmat Dawestashi

Nazwa (The Fling)
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
The Egyptian version of *Fatal Attraction* with Ahmed Zaki, Yousra and Sherine Reda.

Flipper
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Starring the cutest dolphin and Paul Hogan in a film the whole family should enjoy.

Father of the Bride II
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Steve Martin is at it again.

Blood Games
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 250 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Judge Dredd
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Sylvester Stallone swings evil-looking machine guns as he takes justice into his own hands.

The Rock
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Sean Connery, Nicholas Cage and Ed Harris in a tense thriller played out in Alcatraz.

Raging Angels
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm

Diabolique
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Sharon Stone and Isablle Adjani play a demonic trick on men.

Fled
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Quick and The Dead
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
A gun-slinging Sharon Stone meets her match in Gene Hackman.

The Nutty Professor
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, & 9.30pm.
Eddie Murphy, thanks to a chemical experiment, confuses the scales.

Jingle All The Way
MGM, Maadi Grand Mall, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm.

Chain Reaction
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Midnight Shows
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Thur & Sat midnight show.
Thursday: **Primal Fear**
Friday: **Nick of Time**
Saturday: **Mission Impossible**
Sunday: **Twister**

MUSIC

Anas El-Wogoud
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. Until 10 Jan, 8pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company and Orchestra, conducted by Youssef El-Sissi.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 11 Jan, 8pm.
Along with the Cairo Opera Choir, the orchestra performs Adnan Saygoun's Ymes Emry Oratorio, conducted by Hekmat Simcik.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Classical Music of Egypt
Beit El-Harawy, El-Hussein, behind El-Azhar Mosque. 15 Jan, 8pm.
The Abdo Dagher Ensemble performs traditional Egyptian music on the *anoun, nay, oud, req*, and violin, among other instruments.

THEATRE

El-Hares (The Guard)
Abdel-Rehim El-Zerqani Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre. Tel 591 7783. Daily 6pm.
Directed by Mohamed Abdel-Hadi.

Hekmat Hanem..Almaz?
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, as above. Daily 9pm.

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
El-Fann Theatre, Nadi El-Musiqa St, Ramsis. Tel 578 2444. Daily 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 10pm.
Starring Saleh El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

El-Gazzir (The Chain)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini. Tel 355 2484. Daily exc Mon, 9pm.

Ka'b 'Ali (High Heels)
Radio Theatre, 4 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 578 4910. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thur 10pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thus, 10pm.

Gonoun El-Banat (The Madness Of Girls)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 8pm.

El-Fares El-Asmar (The Dark Knight)
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 0954. Thur-Sun 6.30pm; Fri & Sun 11am.

LECTURE

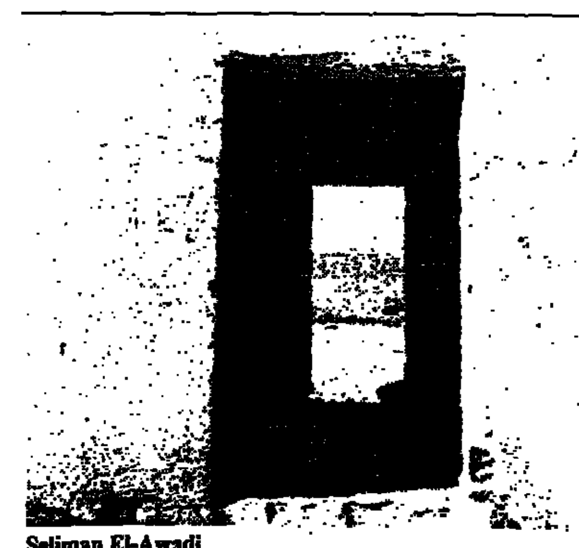
A Vanished Kushite Monument at the 18th Dynasty Temple of Medinet Habu
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 9 Jan, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Peter Dormann, from the Chicago House.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Seliman El-Awadi

PHOTOGRAPHS, 50 in all, by Seliman El-Awadi, are currently showing at the gallery attached to the Faculty of Applied Arts. The photographs, all of which were taken in Kuwait, explore the landscape, architecture and cultural practices of the Emirate.

The Sixth Cairo Biennale continues at the Centre of Arts, Zamalek. Though it has received only a lukewarm critical reception, the event continues to be an important fixture of the cultural calendar. A little controversy will, in the end, do little to alter this.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

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هكذا من الأصل



Take your pick

Nehad Selaiha reviews the first theatrical crop of the new year and gives a few tips on where to go in Ramadan if you get bored with television

photo: Ayman El-Kharrat

The first week of 1997 witnessed a sudden eruption of new and, on the whole, intriguing productions. In the Manf Hall, at the back of the Balloon theatre in Agouza, John Millington Synge's *Dierdre of the Sorrows* (1910) followed close upon the heels of an almost clandestine production (few people heard about it and fewer got to watch it) of a new play by Hisham El-Salamuni directed by Hassan El-Wazir. It sported the titillating and nebulously priapic title, *The Enemy in the Bedroom*. But the unlucky few who stumbled upon it in their theatrical perambulations were peremptorily disillusioned within ten minutes: the amorous invader turned out to be a pallid, bloodless political metaphor for Israel.

Synge's *Dierdre*, on the other hand, is a passionate love story, full of blood and thunder. In it, an aged king falls hopelessly in love with a wild young woman who jilts him for another; his revenge knows no bounds, and he ends up on a mound of ashes — the ruins of his burned kingdom and a heap of corpses. It could have been a stirring production but, unfortunately, it had no spark of either tragedy or passion. Manal Salama, as Dierdre, seemed to have no inkling of what the play was about and delivered her lines in the vapid manner of a Hollywood romantic heroine. Her confrontations with the infatuated king (Tawfiq Abdel-Hamid) were particularly embarrassing: while he raged and ranted she simpered, was alternately primly coy or coquettishly priggish, and daintily wrung her hands like a shy schoolgirl all the time. What the king saw in her was an unfathomable mystery. But most irritating of all were the sets and costumes. They were simply atrocious, and no low budget could excuse their extreme discord and confusion in terms of choice of colour of material or their shabby execution. It is a miracle that the text survived the production and one could still derive some enjoyment out of Synge's vivid imagery and evocative diction.

Compared to *Dierdre of the Sorrows*, the United Artists production *High Heels*, an adaptation of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, or, more precisely, of the American musical *My Fair Lady*, by Samir Khafagi and Farouq Sabri, and directed by Sherif Arafa (the well known film director), seemed almost indecently sumptuous and costly. My experience of the show, however, was curiously one of waiting for a performance that never materialised. It felt (all four hours of it) as if Khafagi (the head of United Artists) and his crew were displaying before us, proudly and somewhat brashly, their resources, raw material, and sophisticated technical equipment — including a very elegant theatre and a fully computerised lighting and set-changing system. They had everything: two fascinating, lovable film stars of great charisma, Yousra and Hussein Fahmi; a generous, unstinting budget; excellent dancers (from the former USSR); decent, if highly derivative choreography (drawing on the Hollywood show-biz tradition); a passable score and lyrics; lavish sets and glamorous costumes; and, to boot, a handful of good comedians. But at the centre of the performance there was a dark, gaping hole. It lacked pith, direction and rhythm. Within an hour the hackneyed situations and interminable series of stereotyped character vignettes grew painfully intolerable. It was all a cold rehash, and the dreary, insipid banality of the form and substance was unworthy of its two stars.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, for those who have not yet feasted their eyes on the dubious treats of *High Heels*, they are not going to have to debate in their minds whether to go and see it or not during the month of Ramadan. It stops at the beginning of the Holy Month and resumes at its end. Nor are they going to struggle with the tantalising allurement of either of the two new Tali'a productions that have just started. Nadia Al-Banhawi's *Love and Death Sonata*, directed by Abbas Ahmad, and Ra'fat Al-Deweri's production of Antonio Buero Vallejo's *Reason's Dream* (*El sueno de la razon*), opened at absolutely the wrong time. With Ramadan knocking at the door neither the ebulliently epicurean nor the rigidly ascetic are likely to be much interested in either awesome 'death' or the forbidding 'dreams' of 'reason'. And maybe it is just as well. When I watched Al-Banhawi's powerful *Sonata*, I realised, to my utter dismay, that the leading lady, Sohair El-Murshidi, had not even bothered to learn her lines. In the small Salah Abdel-Saboor hall of the Tali'a Theatre, she relied on the help of two prompters — one ensconced in the wings, safely out of sight though not of hearing, and the other flagrantly sitting in the front row, in full view (and hearing) of the audience. It was like listening to a music system with three speakers. But even so, on several occasions when she failed to catch the words she resorted to improvisation and ad-libbing, coming up with an astounding medley of out-of-key phrases that shattered the whole sense of the scene and sent it flying in all directions. I have not yet seen *Vallejo's Dream*, but I hope that its lead, actor Hamza El-Shimi, who impersonates the great Goya in the play, will have more sense and 'reason', or at least 'method in his madness'.

Another play which, though boldly iconoclastic, was scheduled to open at Al-Hanager Centre on 5th January and run through Ramadan (and what a breath of fresh air it would have been) is Mohamed Abul So'ood's version of Arthur Miller's *Crucible*. It is likely, however, to be postponed for technical reasons. Whether it will be performed during Ramadan at all is doubtful; not only because, fundamentally sceptical and questioning, it is not in line with the spirit of the season, but also because of the tacit agreement between all people working in the theatre and show business that the first week of Ramadan, and, preferably, the whole of the month, should be the uncontestable playground for television — its quiz and chat programmes and soap operas — religious or mundane.

It all boils down to the fact that for a week or more during Ramadan most of the plays currently on will be out of circulation. Adel Imam's *Al-Zaim* (The Leader) is off, and so are Mohamed Sobhi's *Mama America*, *High Heels*, Galal Al-Sharqawi's hotly controversial *Dostoor ya Siadna* (Pardon Masters), Samir Al-Asfouri's *Ballo* (Ballyhoo), Al-Tali'a's two new productions, Al-Hanager's *Crucible*, the National's *Caretaker* and its musical *Hikmat Hanim Almaz*, and Manf's *Dierdre*. But there are plenty of compensations in terms of variety theatre and other types of live performance. The National Circus will be active and the Balloon Theatre will be staging popular and folk dances every night at 9 o'clock. Al-Hanager promises many musical and poetry evenings and a couple of art exhibitions, and at the site of the old fruit and vegetable market in Rod Al-Farag, recently taken over by the Cultural Palaces Establishment and transformed into a cultural centre, there is going to be a veritable feast, hopefully not too cloying, of religious chanting and popular entertainment.

But the real highlights of Ramadan, to my mind, are going to be Al-Warsha's *Evenings* which will take place at various locations, including Al-Hawari Palace, near Al-Azhar Mosque, on 24 January, followed by three evenings of story-telling, popular songs, shadow-puppet plays and general merry-making at the International Egyptian Book Fair (28-30 January), and preceded by a serving of the same exhilarating menu at the British Council in Agouza between the 20 and 26 of January.

And with the many cultural and entertainment activities which normally take place on the fringe of the Book Fair - which begins this year on 18 January (the 8th of Ramadan) — I do not think we will have any cause for complaint. Samir Sarhan, the head of GEBO, has drawn up an impressive programme which includes musical evenings, theatrical entertainment, poetry evenings, lively seminars on exciting topics and hot issues, and provided for the availability of lots of hot drinks and meals to boost his visitors spirits and physical energy during the long winter evenings and induce them to make the trip to the site of the fair. Many people are already relishing the prospect of having a thoroughly cultural Ramadan and having their midnight meal, *sohoor*, at the 'cultural cafe' which habitually serves some of the most delicious local hot concoctions - *beliela, hilba, sahlab*, or *hummus el-sham*. They are drinks guaranteed to make you swallow almost anything and still keep a good digestion.

What's on this Ramadan? If most theatres will be dark, then theatre, as always, will take to the streets

Plain Talk

The 1995-1996 report of the National Council for Culture, Information and Arts contains 11 papers on areas of activity undertaken by the council, beginning with a discussion of the responsibilities engendered by undertaking cultural work in modern Egypt, and ending with an analysis of media exchanges from a national point of view. It would be difficult, indeed impossible, to discuss all the issues raised in the report. One, though, I believe to be of great importance, namely the cultural integration of the sciences, art and literature.

This subject, to the best of my knowledge, has been under discussion since the publication of C P Snow's *The Two Cultures* back in the forties. No one can deny that there exists a gulf between science and the humanities. Each looks at the other with what, more often than not, amounts to disdain or even condescension. One bone of contention between the two groups is the fact that when one talks about intellectuals or people of culture, as we call them in Egypt, one always means practitioners of the arts and literature. Science does not seem to be regarded as culture.

The first Egyptian intellectuals were the graduates of Al-Azhar, since the only seat of learning in Egypt then was that religious and prestigious university. It was the graduates of El-Azhar who qualified for the title of intellectuals. Indeed it was they who played a leading role in the political life of the country. They formed the nucleus of the resistance movement against Napoleon and were instrumental in proclaiming Mohamed Ali the ruler of Egypt. But towards the end of Mohamed Ali's rule the picture began to change. With the opening of secular schools and the sending of students abroad new elements came into being. The emergence of what one might call secular intellectuals characterised that period, which witnessed an extensive translation movement instigated by Refaa El-Tahtawi.

The new class of intellectuals thrived during the rule of the Khedive Ismail, who opened a large number of secular schools and created cultural institutions, including the National Library, the Egyptian Museum and the Geographical Society. Ismail's era can be regarded as a turning point in Egypt's leap to modernity. The paper dwells at length on this point, reaching the 20th century and the emergence of the middle class with its embrace of education and the founding of the first secular university in 1908.

It was this emergent middle class that sowed the seeds of nationalism which resulted in the 1919 Revolution. But with time, and especially with the advances in science, the concept of the 'intellectual' changed, hence the divide between the two cultures and increasingly narrow specialisation was one of the main factors behind this divide.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Cinema

In search of a distant shore

Hani Mustafa talks to Sayed Said, film maker and critic, about the possibilities of renewal for the film industry that for decades has remained shrouded in its realist mantle

What would happen if Egypt's unsuspecting cinema-goers were faced with endless cinematic innovations? For decades Egyptian films seldom ventured beyond the kind of realism pioneered by the late Salah Abu Seif and Tawfiq Saleh in the 1940s and 1950s. The four or five Egyptian entries in the latest Cairo International Film Festival in fact represent more than half of the films produced in the past year, placing film production at one of its lowest levels for decades, a position that might seem far from conducive to facilitating any break with past models. Nevertheless, if the films shown in the festival are anything to go by — and they are, after all, almost all we do have — then all the signs are that the Egyptian film industry is undergoing some important changes.

Afarit Al-Asfalt (Ashphalt Devils), featured in last year's cinema festival, presented us with one of those conceptual shifts that indicate a lossening of the realist stranglehold. The film strikes out towards new horizons of folk narrative and myth, although it remained perhaps more grounded in reality than the scenario called for.

This year, *El-Qubtan* (The Captain), written and directed by Sayed Said, stands out as breaking new ground. From the outset, the spectator is warned that the film will be unconventional. Before the titles appear, the following sentence appears on the screen: "I am talking to you so you can see, and if you see there is need for me to speak."

The new style of narrative to which the viewer is about to be exposed reflects the cultural consciousness of a director who has also worked as a critic and the chairman of the Association of Egyptian Film Critics. Sayed Said says: "There are two ways of narrative in the cinema. One begins with the text and ends with the recipient. It is based on the presumption that the work is complete and conclusive, allowing for no input on the part of the recipient. This is the traditional mode of conception and narrative. It is didactic. The director plans for all details according to the point of view he wants to convey. The spectator is passive. He/she can agree or disagree with the message, but has no recourse for discussion other than through a post-mortem critique. The second method begins with the text, passes through the recipient and ends up once again at the text. In other words, the spectator can in a sense assume the role of the director. He/she can mentally intervene in the film in order to reconstruct the order of events to suit his/her perception of the material. This is why I attempted to leave gaps in the narrative. The purpose was to let the spectator fill them in, rendering the spectator an active contributor to the creative process."

In articulating the shifting and multi-faceted realities of the film, the director too relies on three layers of narrative. As Sayed Said says, one operates on the level of day to day life in the Egyptian environment. The second functions on the level of the film screen which forms a totally separate world all-be-it similar at times to real life. The third functions on the level of the personal universe of individual spectators. Said adds: "I was careful to keep the film loosely structured. The notion that the world is cohesively structured no longer holds water. Science in particular has shown that the world is not as logically organised as we had once believed. This is why, in the film, I was keen on introducing elements that would appear incongruous, forcing the spectator to mentally reconstruct the film so as to find them a place in the narrative."

It may be the critic's concern to monitor developments in the art. Only a critic-cum-director however could make the conceptual and practical breakthroughs. "My search for a more comprehensive form of narrative is ongoing. Film-making for me is a continual process of discovery. This film has helped me to answer some personal concerns with regard to cinematic creativity and innovation, but not all."

The theme of the film itself has obsessed Said for some time. Indeed he had already created it in novel form, although it remains unpublished. He stressed, however, that the novel did not influence his writing of the scenario: "When writing the novel, I was creating a private world of my own. I left this world behind as soon as I began to write the scenario. I had to make a lot of additions and I had to leave a lot of material out, since each medium has its own entirely different logic of narrative. Cinema is not an alternative form of literary narrative. The substance of a film is its narratives; its form is intrinsic not extrinsic."

The protagonists of the film enhance its chimerical character. The conflict between the captain and the police commissioner acquires by the end an almost epic quality. In fact, the actual identity of the captain remains elusive. Is he Egyptian or Greek? He speaks Greek fluently and even Russian if occasion calls for it. "He is a type of individual who might appear in any context, yet strikes one as eccentric,"explains Said. "I wanted to keep this character open to all interpretations. I was particularly impressed with the opinion of one of the members on the board of censors who told me that the captain was actually the figment of the imagination of the police commissioner since any such authority needs an adversary in order to sense its own existence. That is why, when he first meets the captain, the police commissioner feels that he has seen him before. The character could also represent an international freedom fighter since oppression exists in all countries. Alternatively, he could represent the dream of a popular hero come to life or, conversely, the immortal people. As for the conflict between the captain and the police commissioner, this too has an eternal dimension. It precedes the existence of the characters, not unlike the predestined antagonism between Tom and Jerry. I hinted at this toward the end of the film when, in the home of the police commissioner, Mallawani comes across a picture of the captain and an epic-like story of the captain involved in an eternal conflict. The first part of this story is going to be the subject of my next film."



Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz plays the title role in Sayed Said's *El-Qubtan*

Other elements of the film help break into another dimension and rupture the passivity of the spectator, even if, at times, they approach the melodramatic. For example, the young Mallawani falls in love with a young woman who has been forced into marrying the police commissioner. The lovers are executed. Immediately following the execution, the camera cuts to the two lovers running hand in hand along a seashore enveloped in light. Said comments: "In my view they did not die. Their love is eternal. It began in the sea when Mallawani came across her swimming in the nude and it returned to the sea as though their death was only the figment of someone's imagination. This was one function of the rondo form which I have introduced into the scenario. The other was to avoid unnecessary melodrama. That is why, for example, I had the captain die in an almost comic manner."

The film, nevertheless, has a political dimension that keeps it anchored in contemporary reality. It is set chronologically against the background of the 1948 War. "Any particular place at any moment of history has certain ramifications," explains Said. "I chose 1948 because of the opportunities for contemplation that it offered. To me it was not the monentousness of those events themselves that were important but the general climate of defeat and how that affected the relationship between the authorities and the people, notions of love and sacrifice, and the breaking of illusions. Port Said was for me a logical choice for the location since I was born there and the lights of the city, its vitality, the activity of the port, are permanently embedded in my mind's eye."

In this context, the director does take occasion to make direct political commentary. In one scene he does this with pointed satire. The captain and a Palestinian are the last customers left in a bar. The captain tells his interlocutor that this was neither the time nor the place to fight the Zionists, particularly since the Zionists were not there in the bar but over in Palestine. In another scene the allusion to the 1948 defeat is more poignant when he portrays a child from Port Said who has adopted an orphaned Palestinian child. Said comments: "My inclusion of Palestinians was important, firstly because they were a part of our day-to-day reality and secondly because the Palestinian cause still dominates Arab and Egyptian concerns. As is clear in my film, I wanted to demonstrate that Egypt has offered and continues to offer every help it can toward this cause."

The difficulties this film met with regard to financing are indicative of the obstacles the new generation of film-makers face. Producers need to witness success, they require a proven track record before they are willing to take a risk. Which has meant that increasingly those involved in the industry are themselves acting as producers, taking out loans to finance their projects.

"The problem I had to contend with in making this film," says Said, "is that my producer suffered a setback in his commercial cinema sales abroad, forcing me to suspend the shooting of the film for a while. For me this problem was particularly acute since the film takes place in winter and I could not resume the shooting of many scenes until the following winter."

However, if financing proved erratic, the director's artistic resources remained a constant. His exploration into new modes of cinematic narrative and form give us great hope that the conventions of Egyptian film industry are on the verge of a long-awaited change in course.

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Black ties and 'flower pots'

No festive season would be complete without a performance of the *Nutcracker* at the Opera House, but as **Fayza Hassan** finds out, one has to dress up for the occasion

End-of-year festivities are the occasion for Cairene society to make its fashion statement and, typically, it has once more confirmed its main characteristic: diversity.

For the past two centuries, Egyptian women have had the chance to enthusiastically embrace Western fashions, often peppering their Parisian gowns with Oriental ornamentation. Evenings at the Cairo Opera bear witness to the freedom allowed in the choice of women's attire, which ranges from numerous interpretations of the *higab* to the micro dress, often shorter than its wearer's long curls. Men, however, are not given the same leeway. They would be unable to view the Nutcracker, or any other performance taking place in the Opera's main hall, unless they donned a full suit, complete with necktie — the Opera management's definition of proper dress.

Oversights can sometimes be taken care of, as ties and even jackets are available at the door. An official spokesman for the Opera, who at first refused to discuss the rule, claiming that it was in force at opera houses around the world, later admitted that it included men in national costume. An African diplomat in national dress, therefore, would not be turned away at the door. But the Egyptian national costume, he said, was the European suit. After some prompting he agreed that a *kaftan* and *abaya* would also qualify, "although they would have to be impeccable and we should have proof that they are the wearer's habitual formal clothes," he added.

A century and a half ago, the confusion as to what constituted the Egyptian national costume would probably have been even greater. According to E W Lane, writing in the 1830s, "the dress of men of the middle and higher classes consists of ... a pair of full drawers of linen or cotton, tied around the body by a running string or band, the ends of which are embroidered with coloured silks though concealed by the outer dress... a shirt with very full sleeves reaching to the wrist. Over this, in winter or in cool weather... a *sudeyree* which is a short vest of cloth or of striped silk and cotton without sleeves. Over the shirt and *sudeyree*... a long vest of striped silk and cotton called *kaftan*... descending to the ankles with long sleeves extending a few inches beyond the fingers' ends but divided from a point a little above the wrist... so that the hand is generally exposed... Round this vest is wound the girdle, which is a coloured shawl or a long piece of white-figured muslin. The ordinary outer robe is a long cloth cloak of any colour [the *gibbeh*], the sleeves of which reach not quite to the wrist."

The *beneesh*, a robe of cloth with long sleeves, worn over the other clothes, was a ceremonial robe. The *abaya*, a black woolen cloak, was worn in cold weather together with a shawl. To complicate matters, the rich sometimes wore a brown or black long vest over their finery in order to avoid drawing attention to their elevated station.

Usually, however, there were few chances of confusing the rich with the poor, whose costume was extremely simple, consisting of drawers and a long shirt open at the front to the waist and complemented sometimes with a white, blue or red girdle. The extremely poor were often unable to afford even this simple costume and contented themselves with the shirt.

The head-dress also varied according to the fortune of the wearer. "For the rich," writes Lane, "the head dress consists of a small, close fitting cotton cap which is often changed; next, a *tarboosh* which is a red cloth cap also fitting closely to the head, with a tassel of dark-blue silk at the crown; lastly a long piece of white generally figured muslin or a cashmere shawl, wound around the *tarboosh*. Thus is formed the turban. Some persons wear two or three *tarbooshes*, one over another. A *Shereef* (a descendant of the Prophet) wears a green turban and sometimes a bright green robe, but no other person does."

The turbans of the poor, on the other hand were made of a length of coarse material wound around a cheap *tarboosh* under which was worn a white or brown felt cap, "but many are so poor that they have no other cap than the latter," observed Lane.

Under the reign of Mohammed Ali, a large number of factories were founded. Beside cotton textile spinning and weaving factories, factories for the production of silk, woolens and linens were established. The relative success of this local manufacture and the high price of imported finished products encouraged Mohammed Ali to extend his scope. *Tarbooshes*, which at the time were imported from France and North Africa, were among the targets of the Pasha's import substitution policies. To produce them locally, a *tarboosh* factory was set up in Fuwa which supplied the army with 720 *tarbooshes* daily, according to Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot.

After 1882 and the British occupation, local manufactures were actively discouraged by the colonising forces while imports were boosted. "Even the *tarboosh*, worn by the Egyptian citizen as a patriotic gesture, almost a duty, came to him from the outside world," comments Jacques Berque. Soon imported European clothes appeared in the stores, while tailors endeavoured to copy Western styles. The upper and middle classes who had access to Western culture adopted these styles enthusiastically.

By the 1920s, complete confusion reigned in the realm of fashion. Berque describes the street scene in those days: "On the city pavement dress assumed a classificatory and indeed almost philosophical importance. Visitors and citizens were alarmed at its heterogeneity. Witnesses have described the University as a fashion show, where the most diverse forms of dress were seen side by side... Some men wore Western dress, the *badla* [dress suit] topped with the *tarboosh*, a sort of compromise between the national and the imported, a reconciliation of the *qadim* and the *jadid*. And beside them men walked bare-headed or wearing berets or clad in turbans and robes to assert their loyalty to Islam."

While some Egyptians were in favour of abandoning the last vestiges of their "Orientalism", exchanging the *tarboosh* for the beret (like Tawfik El-Hakim) or the European hat, others staunchly stuck to the *tarboosh*, Egyptian style, a higher, more rigid version of its North African and Ottoman counterparts. By this time it had come to symbolise nationalist feelings and served to define its wearers as not completely won over to Western ways.

The colonising elite and foreigners residing in the country, although not always averse to wearing it themselves, often came to refer contemptuously to Egyptians as *les tarbouchards*, while Lawrence Durrell listened to "the clip-clop of horse-drawn carriages carrying civil servants in red flowerpots..."

A famous cartoon character of the period, El-Misri Effendi (which may be roughly translated as Mister Egyptian), sheds light on the confusion of the ordinary man in the street, the average bureaucrat, who had received a hodge-podge of Western training and Egyptian culture, and who, somewhat bewildered as to where his allegiances lay, prudently chose a middle course. Describing El-Misri Effendi, Berque writes: "There was nothing of the *fellah* about him nor of the desert rider. He was a tubby fellow, an obvious petty bourgeois who wore a Western style jacket though he still sported the traditional *tarboosh*." El-Misri Effendi rejected the *tarboosh's* political connotation, however, and was quick to mock street demonstrations at which protesters often threw their hats in the air as a sign of rebellion.

In a totally different context, theatre-goers used to toss their *tarbooshes* onto the stage to show their appreciation of a particularly good female performer. Apart from being an object of national pride, the *tarboosh* served other social functions; for instance, it indicated the mood or good fortune of its wearer. Its size, shade of crimson, the particular inclination at which it was titled on the head, were as many clues that all Egyptians deciphered at a glance. Worn by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, it was something of a link between members of an heteroclitous society striving for national unity.

In Robert Sole's *Le Tarbouche*, businessman Georges Batrakani, of Syrian origin, unsure of whether he is an Egyptian or not, but a principled *tarboosh*-wearer nevertheless, retraces the evolution of the famous head-dress for the benefit of his guest, Edouard Dhellemmes, a Frenchman who has come to Egypt in search of business opportunities. "This is the *Watani*, the cheapest variety, explained Georges, extracting from a box a large goblet of red felt with a mane of black silk dangling down the back. 'It is worth the equivalent of two francs twenty five. Then you have the *Abbassi* at three francs fifty. And then — look at the difference — the Excelsior, priced at five francs. But the king of Austrian *tarbooshes*, the most elegant, is indisputably the Eagle, that you have before you. Touch it, feel how soft and silky the materials... Can you feel it? The Eagle is definitely worth its 13 francs..."

With the war, explains Batrakani to the Frenchman, dealings with Austria, the main exporter of *tarbooshes* to Egypt, are forbidden. The vacuum begs to be filled. "You see, Mr Dhellemmes, since imports have been stopped, prices have flared up. The result is that some Jews and some Syrians in Cairo have abandoned the *tarboosh*. They have adopted, instead, the Western hat, considerably less expensive." Batrakani then explains the changes in *tarboosh* styles over the years — "because the *tarboosh* has its fashions, you see" — showing Dhellemmes several lithographies which he arranges before the visitor: "Here is Mohammed Ali, founder of the reigning dynasty, look at his strange coiffe, one can hardly speak of a *tarboosh*. With Abbas and Said here, the fez starts to take shape, to straighten up. But it has yet to double in height. Observe now Sultan Hussein, the present sovereign: it is the British who have introduced the large, stiff *tarboosh*, lined with straw, which has the merit of keeping its shape."

Batrakani advises Dhellemmes to manufacture *tarbooshes* in France which he, Batrakani, will sell for him in Egypt. The Frenchman is skeptical; could the *tarboosh* not one day disappear? Would Egyptians not discard this fashion for another? "You are joking," says Batrakani. "Egyptians have been wearing the *tarboosh* for more than a hundred years. They will never be able to do without it. This head-dress has become a national attribute."

Twenty years later, Batrakani was to be proved wrong. With the 1952 Revolution, the *tarboosh* disappeared for ever from the streets of Cairo and finally took its place on stage, where it became an object of ridicule. While members of the French expedition had once exclaimed in indignation at the sight of the organ-grinder who, to make his audience laugh, dressed his monkey in Western garb, a century and a half later, it was the *tarboosh* which had become the symbol of a corrupt and decadent ruling class.



"It was a miniscule shop, with a counter adorned with brass bowls of various sizes. The clients came in, uncovered their heads and, without a word, handed over their *tarboosh*. The shop attendant would lift one of the double-bottomed bowls and place the head-dress between the two parts of the mold, rotating it with the handle. Steam would rise. The *tarboosh* would be withdrawn a few minutes later, smoking and as stiff as wood." Robert Solé, *Le Tarbouche*

***Saad Zaghloul: the tarboosh* became the symbol of nationalism**

El-Misri Effendi

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The smell of luck

By the standards of his times he was an enlightened man who enjoyed the benefits of the best education. He had run away from his village in Upper Egypt when he was barely twelve and trekked, barefoot, all the way to Cairo. His brother, a well-established lawyer in the capital, had taken him in, giving him a chance to go to school and then to university. He had made good use of his brother's generosity, acquiring a well-appointed lawyer's office in the city centre. The *fallahin* from his village came to him with their problems and sat for long hours in his waiting room for a chance to seek his advice. At forty, he was financially secure and could afford to give free consultations to those who could not pay his fees. They came, bearing gifts of chickens and geese which were entrusted to his chauffeur, stuffed squalling into the boot of his Lassale limousine and brought home, to the intense displeasure of his wife.

He bought few things himself, not always for their quality or taste, but rather on a whim, because their acquisition gave him a few moments of pleasure. He never parted with any of his possessions, keeping them in his room, forgotten, but providing security by their mere presence. He had never trusted banks with his valuables or money. The whole concept of banking escaped him. He refused to have strangers take control of his life. He brought his cash home, the bills neatly stacked in his wallet in ascending order.

In his bedroom, he would use a small key that never left his gold key chain to unlock the funny little toy box sitting on his bedside table. He would search for the larger key hidden under an assortment of ageing Christmas decorations and, having retrieved it, open the wardrobe where his suits hung, arranged by colour, summer lightweights on the left, the heavier winter garb on the right. He would search the pockets for a while, until he found a third key which opened the left side of the wardrobe, where his raw silk monogrammed shirts and his fine cotton underwear were neatly stacked.

He kept his collection of fountain pens, cigarette cases and lighters on the shelf. Some were collectors' items, others had been bought for a few pounds from the peddlers who sold their wares at the café where he played *tawla*. They were all equally valuable to him, the cheaper items invariably conjuring up memories of sweet victories over his adversaries at the game, or the pleasure of interminable haggling with a particularly tough vendor.

On the same shelf he kept a family-size box of Lux soap. He liked the smell of Lux. He found it rather subtle, not too overpowering, yet rich at the same time, symbolic of the affluence he now enjoyed. His mother's home-made soap, back in the village, had a slightly acrid, unpleasant smell which had permeated his *galabiya*, sticking to his skin like a greasy film. He had never felt clean in those days, he remembered.

It was different with Lux, which left a faint perfume on his clothes, reminiscent of the smell of his garden when the jasmine was in bloom. He would lift the cakes of soap one by one, fingering the wrappings absentmindedly. Having emptied the box, he would carefully place in it the contents of his wallet, covering the bills with tissue paper and replacing the cakes of soap on top. He would then retrace his steps, making sure that he hid the third key in the pocket of a different suit every time.

On the rare occasions when his wife witnessed the procedure, she would shake her head in bewilderment. Why didn't he buy a safe, she had often asked. "Then everyone will know we have money in the house and attempt to rob us," he had answered patiently. His wife knew that he was being robbed blind — by his most trusted servant. More than once, she had seen the scoundrel crawling on all fours past the desk at which her husband sat, lost in study of the next day's briefs. There was no point in telling him. He would accuse her of having visions, on account of her "bad nerves". Well, it was his money and, if he insisted on being a fool, she was ready to oblige. Her own money was safe in the bank.

One day a man came to the house, the brother of one of the servants. His son had been sick for a long time. It was his brother's wrongdoing which had brought bad luck to the family, he said. From the inside pocket of his *galabiya* he extracted a key and a rather large stack of bills. At once the smell of Lux filled the air. The key, said the servant's brother, opened the side of the wardrobe where the Bey kept his money under the cakes of soap. He had beaten his brother, who had confessed.

The Bey looked at the key in amazement. The smell of Lux tickled his nostrils disagreeably. He had been outsmarted by a stupid servant. He shook his head. "You made a mistake, my good man," he said firmly. "None of this belongs to me. Your brother did not steal anything here. I hope you will find a cure for your son."

He walked slowly towards his bedroom. Never again did he buy Lux.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Potato soup with veal

Ingredients:
1/2 kg. veal boneless chunks
1 1/2 kg. potatoes
1 onion (chopped)
2 tbsp. white flour
1 bunch parsley leaves (finely chopped)
2 loaves pita bread (cut in squares)
Butter
Oil
Salt+pepper+allspice

Method:
Boil the veal until cooked and remove from its broth. Strain 5 cups of broth in another container. Peel the potatoes, wash them well, boil them with the onion and leave to cook over medium heat. When the potatoes and the onion are tender, mash them well in a vegetable *moulin*. Melt the butter and add the flour, stirring without colouring it then add them to the mashed vegetables. Over medium heat, gradually pour the veal broth over them, stirring gently, then add the veal chunks, season and continue cooking for only ten more minutes. In some oil, deep fry the pita bread squares until golden, removing them on kitchen blotting paper. Pour the soup in a serving bowl, sprinkle the parsley on top and serve hot with the fried pita bread aside.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Starched and stainless

Nigel Ryan on the heavier carbohydrates

There really is not very much to be said about *koshari*. It is there, that is all, and it is exceptionally popular. It is cheap, filling, and quite possibly nutritious in a starchy kind of way. The Cairene version is often quite heavy on pasta, as well as rice, lentils, occasionally chick peas and always fried onions.

Everyone has their favourite combination of ingredients. Everyone has their favourite *koshari* shop. For a great many people that particular honour goes to Abou Tarek, on Champollion Street, which over the years has developed into a shrine to the dish.

You know when you are approaching the place because there are ceramic planters rising from the pavement filled with artificial trees in constant bloom and nasturtiums trailing silky flowers. You know too because there is likely to be a crowd around on the pavement, people milling to and fro, banging into one another as they enter or exit, trying hard not to end up in a bed of artificial flowers. For make no mistake, Abou Tarek is a crowd puller.

This is *the* emporium. Two floors lie behind the marble clad facade that dominates its corner site, and they are invariably crowded. The menu is simple, *koshari* and nothing else. But the *koshari* comes in a variety of grades, and the menu, which hangs by the side of the desk at which you pay, adopts a self-congratulatory tone. It is the written equivalent of those press-ups, completed by the particularly fit, which involve a round of self applause at full extension. Push, clap, push, clap. For LE1.50 you can order "*koshari* excellent", for LE 2 "*koshari* supreme".

It was *koshari* excellent, though, for me. I collected my little brass disc from the man at the till, handed it over across a polished granite counter and was presented with my bowl. The ground-floor tables were all crowded, and so up the stairs and onto the first floor, which has rather more tables and, unfortunately, rather more customers. Finally I was able to wedge myself into a window seat.

The interior is almost as glitzy as the exterior, though without the artificial trees. Overall, the feel is retro sci-fi, with zig-zag marble and granite floors and stretches of stainless steel tables. One feels that there should be acres and acres of floor, though in fact it is not that extensive. Each table has two stainless steel containers, with lemon or hot sauce. The hot sauce is hot, the lemon acidic.

The *koshari* itself is quite heavy on rice, which I prefer, and brown lentils. It also contains several bits of pasta in various shapes. Is it a little precious, having ordered *koshari*, to complain that the pasta was too starchy? Perhaps it is, but the pasta was. The tomato sauce was fine. A bowl, even a bowl of "excellent", is enormous. Heaven alone knows how much you would get with "supreme".

Is Abou Tarek my favourite *koshari* shop? Well, to tell the truth, I don't really like *koshari* very much. That said, it was fine, and for LE 1.50, who's complaining? Certainly not the crowds I encountered.

Abou Tarek, Champollion Street, Downtown. Tel: 775935

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across
1. Savoir-faire (4)
5. Ankle-bone; sloping mound (5)
10. Tell ales (4)
14. Third portion of small intestine, pl. (4)
15. Fall short; be insufficient (5)
16. Be delirious (4)
17. Nobleman (4)
18. Poke (5)
19. Solo song (4)
20. Reply in kind (6)
22. Describing evasive or slippery personality (4)
24. Type of marine fish (3)
25. Lifeless (5)
27. Having no prospects of advancement, hyph. wds. (7)
29. Corpulent; well-fed (3)
31. Immediately payable (3)
32. Weather directions (3)
33. Small European coin (3)
34. Last of a series; Greek letter (5)
37. Maritime (5)
41. Cancel; remove ties (4)
43. Add; small child (3)
44. Bulgarian coins (4)
45. Believes; judges (5)
47. Cowls (5)
50. Rot flax (3)
51. Spike of corn (3)
53. Comb. form for modern (3)
54. Fury (3)
55. Farah Diba is one (7)
59. Splendour (5)
61. ... Kapital (3)
62. Hercules killed it (4)
64. Send back to custody (6)
67. Black; blotted (4)
69. Blockade; cordon off (5)
71. Musical instrument (4)
72. Double curve in architecture (4)
73. Outcome; point in question 95)
74. Arm bone (4)
75. Cages for hawks (4)
76. Without discount, pl. (5)
77. A pipe (4)

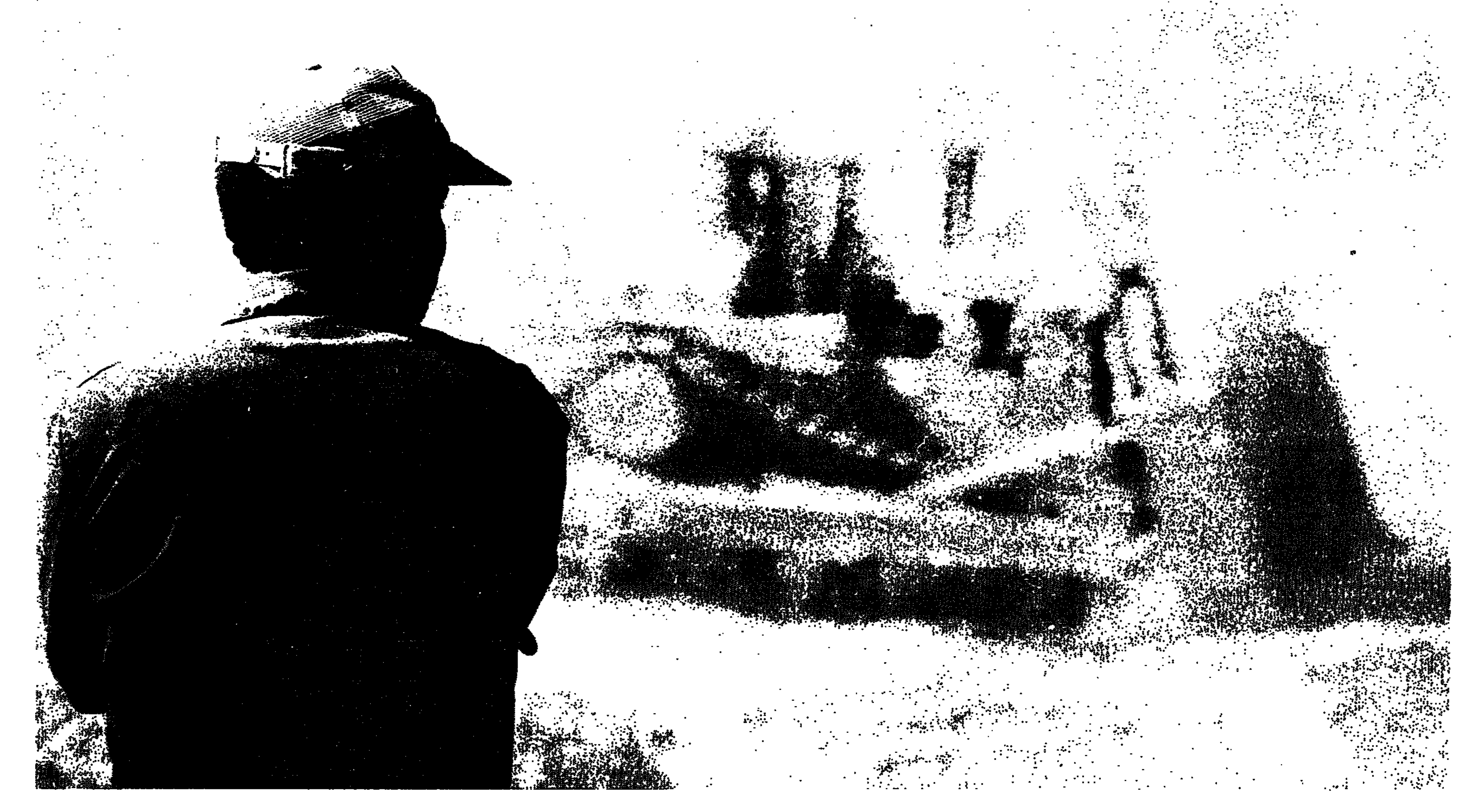
DOWN
1. Storey (4)
2. Wings or winglike parts (4)
3. Confidence (9)
4. Ogee moulding; cards left after deal (5)
5. Outburst; paroxysm (7)
6. Father of, Arabic (3)
7. Vein of metal ore (4)
8. Accelerated; pushed on (5)
9. Axial cylinders in root of plant (6)
10. Women's garment (3)
11. Colossal (5)
12. Pertaining to birds (5)
13. Oppose openly; chin tuft (5)
21. Furnish again (4)
23. Gape; be wide open (4)
26. Dentures (5)
28. Trade; distribute (4)
29. Vendetta (4)
30. Skin disease (4)
35. Viscous substance (3)
36. Redeem (5)
38. Authentic (9)
39. Guarantee; vouch (4)
40. Not punctual (4)
42. Premonition (4)
43. Voyage at sea (4)
48. Commands; rulings (7)
49. Flat-fish much esteemed (4)
52. Partially dried grape (6)
55. Language of a people (5)
56. Reach; align (5)
57. Crookedly; to one side (5)
58. Clamour (5)
60. French for love (5)
63. Cozy place (4)
65. Not a single item (4)
66. Extinct; lethargic (4)
68. Affirmative (3)
70. Entrails (3)

Last week's solution

هكذا من الأصل

هكذا من الأصل

Launching their most ambitious project since the Aswan High Dam, Egyptians have embarked on a new conquest — to break out of the confines of the Nile Valley and to create new life where for millennia there was only desolation. **Dina Ezzat** and photographer **Sherif Sonbol** saw it begin. Meanwhile, a concerted effort is being made to rationalise irrigation within the valley and conserve precious Nile waters, as **Jamaal-ud-deen Musallam** found out



No less than new life



photo: Antoune Albert

Today, 9 January, President Mubarak inaugurates the New Valley project — the same day on which the founding stone of the Aswan High Dam was laid 37 years ago. Building for the future (left) inspiration is sought from the achievements of the past (right)

In the middle of nowhere in the south-western desert, close to the Egyptian-Sudanese border, construction work is in full swing. Hundreds of labourers and engineers, tons of heavy machinery, dozens of tractors and jeeps, large boxes of dynamite, heaps of construction material, and deafening noise tell of the enormous effort being exerted. The fruits of this labour will be a new canal which will allow Nile water to flow into the Western Desert and bring life to this barren land.

Two parallel lines of red and white flags mark what is planned to be the first two kilometres of the banks of the new canal which, according to workers and engineers at the construction site, is the "future of Egypt".

Officially speaking, no specific name has been given to the project. Some call it the New Valley Canal, others called it the Sheikh Zayed canal — in reference to the financial support promised by the president of the United Arab Emirates. But many are dubbing it the "Mubarak project" to underline the support given by President Hosni Mubarak to this major undertaking.

The canal will take water from Lake Nasser (a large artificial lake created behind the High Dam to accommodate access to water from Egypt's annual 55.5 billion cubic metres share of the Nile waters) and carry it for hundreds of kilometres through the dry enclaves of the dead desert in parts of south-western Egypt and the New Valley Governorate.

Today the project was given the official go-ahead by President Mubarak. It will take no less than a quarter of a century to be fully completed. However, since the project is divided into seven phases, engineers on site and officials from the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources expect that in around four years the first agrarian community will be established along the banks of the first section of the new canal.

"This is one of the biggest and most important projects in Egypt's modern history," said Mohamed El-Amir, vice-president of the High Dam Authority and a senior supervisor of the construction site. He added, "This is not just a canal, this is the canal that would make life better for all of us and for the coming generations".

The canal consists of 500 metre-long tunnels that will be built under the waters of Lake Nasser, a pumping station including 26 pumping units, and the actual body of the canal which is a few hundred kilometres long. Side-line canals will be dug off the main body of the new canal to allow water to reach reclaimed land.

By the year 2025, the canal, now in the initial phases of construction, will carry more than two billion cubic metres of water to land south of the High Dam. Water will then be carried to the western north, reaching the oases of El-Kharga and El-Dakhla.

As a result around a million feddans would be reclaimed and cultivated around this canal. This will immediately mean more food, more job opportunities, more industries, and best of all more inhabited land.

"We are now living on only four per cent of the land in Egypt. When this project is completed we will be living on around 30 per cent of the land we have," said Abdel-Razik El-Gishi, a senior engineer at Mussahamat El-Behira, the company contracted to begin digging the new canal.

And the beginning is an enthusiastic one. The digging and construction labour is continued round the clock. "When we first arrived at this spot around three months ago, it was literally a no-man's land. Apart from the snakes and the terrifying howls of wolves there was absolutely nothing. On our second day it was very difficult for us to find our way back to the same spot," recalled Mohamed Hilal, research director at the National Water Research Institute.

Hilal's first excursion to the site, along with some 200 researchers and engineers, aimed at studying the nature of the land and water in the area. The trip was launched after the ministries of water resources, electricity, agriculture, construction and culture agreed that the current site of the canal is the best spot since, among other concerns, it does not hide any unearthed ancient ruins and it is a good choice for a new agrarian valley.

Although not a unanimous one, this decision was based on two main considerations — the water level at this particular spot of Lake Nasser and the nature of the land.

Critics of the project have protested that the effort will cost the state billions of pounds while bringing about a limited benefit. They further argued that the electric power needed to pump the water will be too costly and that high evaporation rates will ultimately force farmers at the would be reclaimed fields to deal with water shortage.

But according to Hilal, the chosen site covers these points. The current site allows the construction team to build underwater tunnels at 147 metres above the Mediterranean level and the pumping station at 200 metres above sea level. Thus electric energy is required to pump water no more than 55 metres.

The nature of the ground also proved suitable. "For a canal that is going to carry some 300 cubic metres per second, we prefer to have a canal which is mostly dug rather than built," said El-Gishi. He added, "At the current construction site the largest section of soil is rocky rather than sandstone. This will guarantee that in the long run the banks of the canal or the side-line canals will not decay from the water pressure." Meanwhile, the evaporation degrees for surface water at this area do not even reach point five per cent.

"In short, the choice of this spot refutes all the objections that were raised against the project," stated Hilal.

Some confusion between this canal and the Tushki Spillway — opened in November of last year for the first time since its construction in the 1980s to accommodate excess flood waters — cast some shadows of doubt over the project. The origin of the confusion is due to the fact that this project was announced shortly after the access flood waters began to flow through Tushki. Hilal said, "This new canal has nothing to do with the Tushki Spillway. It starts some 8km north of the spillway and will not depend on the seasonal water that goes in the spillway at all."

Efforts are also being exerted to make use of the Tushki waters by starting a seasonal bank-side agriculture around the Tushki Spillway. Land will be reclaimed around large clusters of water wells at the far ends of the Western Desert near the Egyptian-Libyan borders.

"It is all because of the High Dam. This prosperity is all due to the dam that Nasser built in the 1960s," said Ibrahim El-Sayed, an electricity technician who worked on the High Dam and is contributing to the initial phases of work on the new canal. "With this canal we will approach a new phase of development."

To the last drop

The Nile provides the main source of fresh water in Egypt: more than 90 per cent of Egypt's total irrigated land is in the Nile Valley and Delta. But according to experts, the irrigation network is outdated and incapable of accommodating the present increase in cultivated land. "The old water control and distribution system extends over 1,200km, from Aswan to the Mediterranean. The system consists of two dams and seven barrages on the Nile, which divert water into 37,000km of canals and remove drainage water through 18,000km of drains," explains Mohamed Hassan Amer, chairman of the Egyptian national committee of the International Congress for Irrigation and Development. According to the *Irrigation Development Plan*, issued by the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources in 1979, inefficient irrigation costs Egypt 19.4 billion cubic metres of wasted water annually — a staggering 35 per cent of its quota of Nile water.

Construction work on the Irrigation Improvement Project (IIP) began in 1985. The project, slated for completion by 2017, represents efforts to use every drop of irrigation water and avoid any waste.

The IIP began functioning in 1989. An area of 100,000 feddans has already received improved irrigation and is now divided into 11 areas. So far, costs incurred amount to LE110 million, 80 per cent of which was provided as a grant by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Nabil Fawzi, head of the Irrigation Improvement Department, affiliated to the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources, explains that IIP is an attempt to replace a relatively ineffective rotation system with perennial irrigation. The old system meant that branch canals operated in cycles — five days on and 10 days off, or five on and five off. As a result, water was not always available. The IIP is intended to remedy this problem.

"Replacing the old irrigation channels, which were dug into the earth itself, with pipelines or small, elevated canals is supposed to save water by preventing leakage and the accumulation of weeds which block the channels. It will also save time and costs since one big pump will be used instead of several, and will waste less cultivated land since it occupies less space," Fawzi explains.

For the same project, the government has already received a loan of $182 million from the World Bank. This, according to Fawzi, was provided in order to upgrade about 250,000 feddans, as part of a larger plan to improve irrigated land (6.5 million feddans) by 2017.

Essam Barakat, general director of Irrigation Advisory Service (IAS), says that the project has resulted in the establishment of small associations owned, controlled and operated by their members — the cultivators. With perennial irrigation, the cultivators need no longer rely on a centralised water distribution system controlled by the government, but can simply decide among themselves when to open the taps and water their fields. Barakat argues that the new system will be to the cultivators' direct benefit, since it will allow them to increase production through better distribution and water use. The associations will be responsible for the management, operation and maintenance of the small channel system and will receive assistance from the IAS.

"Participatory irrigation management, or in other words the participation of the cultivators in the management of the irrigation systems, offers a solution to two of the most notoriously difficult challenges facing the world today," says Hatsuya Azumi, chief of the environment and natural resources division of the Economic Development Institute at the World Bank.

"The first challenge is the scarcity of water. If there is a major war in the next century, it may well be over the issue of water. The second challenge is the unbearable financial burden to governments," he elaborates.

The assumption that only government can manage large infrastructure projects is no longer valid, according to Azumi. Government's new role is to provide support and technical advisory services to the new managers of the irrigation systems: the cultivators themselves. "Who says farmers cannot manage large irrigation systems? I dare say they can," he concludes.

But according to Ali Nuweigi, head of the agricultural committee of the opposition Tagammu Party, a major factor in water mismanagement is the fact that cultivators are free to choose which crop to plant. In his view, liberalisation breeds irrationality in agriculture. For instance, Nuweigi notes, cultivators prefer to plant rice because it does not require as much processing as wheat, and, unlike wheat, can be consumed immediately. But a feddan of rice requires 7,000 cubic metres of water annually, while wheat uses less than 1,000 cubic metres. Wheat, therefore, is preferable from an environmental point of view, but not from the individual cultivator's economic perspective.

Abdel-Rahman Shalabi, senior under-secretary for planning at the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources, asserts on the other hand that "economic liberalisation, including the reversal of centrally determined crop distribution, is irrevocable," and that "the concerned ministries have to accommodate themselves to the new conditions."

The total area of cultivated land is estimated at 7.12 million feddans. This is a meagre three per cent of the total area of Egypt.

"The ministry currently provides 60 billion cubic metres a year of surface and underground water as well as recycled water for irrigation," says Shalabi. "We plan to provide an additional nine billion cubic metres of recycled irrigation drainage water as well as underground water by 2000. This will cover the irrigation requirements of about one million acres."

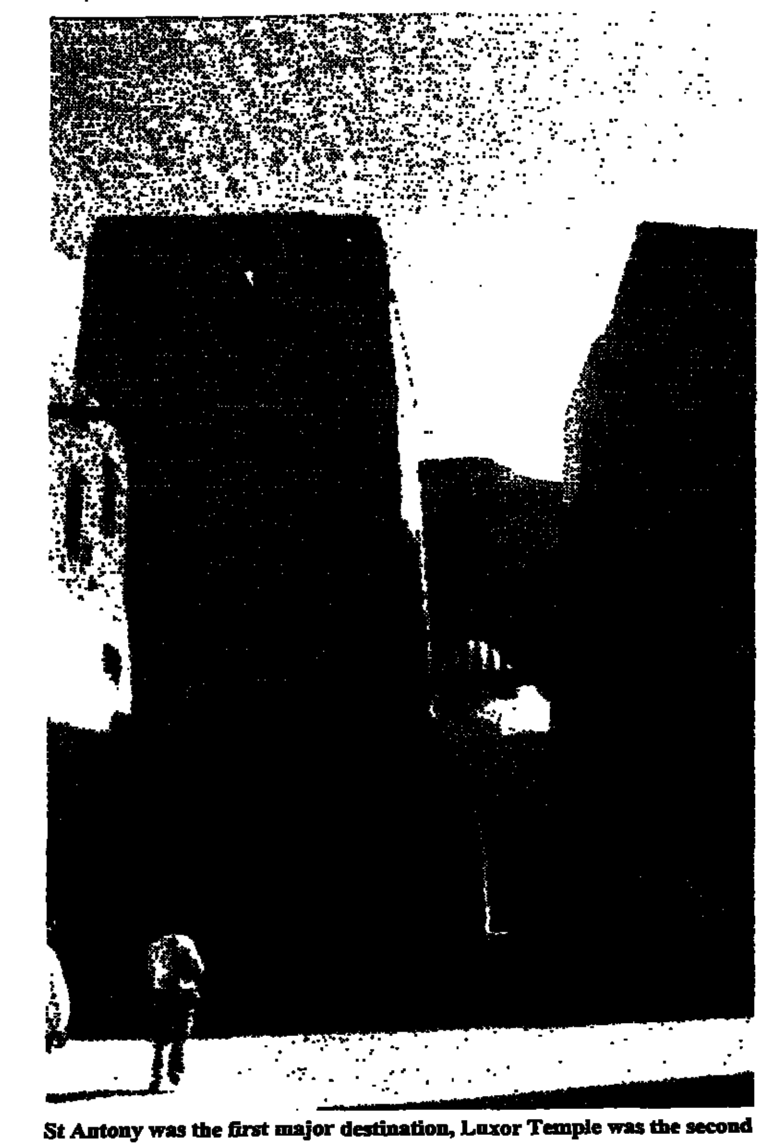
Fayek Boutros, head of the irrigation expansion and irrigation improvement department at the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources, is optimistic that, by the year 2000, an additional 2.5 million feddans will have been reclaimed as arable land: "Of course, that will not lead to food self-sufficiency, but it is better than nothing."

Some sewage water will be treated and used for the irrigation of certain crops such as trees (for wood), sugar beet and vegetables destined for processing, while other water resources will be obtained from irrigation drainage water mixed with sufficient proportions of Nile water, Boutros adds.

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A visit to the monasteries of St Antony and St Paul on the Red Sea coast ended up being a voyage of discovery. **Jill Kamil** describes her experience





St Antony was the first major destination, Luxor Temple was the second

The road to St Paul's

Our desert drive to the monasteries of St Antony and St Paul was a mixture of pleasant surprises and a few disappointments.

We set off by car from Maadi, heading south. Driving through the industrial zone of Helwan is still much as it has been for the last 25 years: polluted, with disorganised motoring on a badly-surfaced, oil-drenched road. A far cry from the world-famous health spa it was at the turn of the century.

Having passed the last of the cement factories, we travelled for about 20 minutes before we came to Saff where we were pleasantly surprised to find ourselves on a freshly paved, dual-highway, flanked by smoothed pavements and newly planted trees. Fruit kiosks, service stations and village marketplace all bespoke order.

We turned east at Koraymat to cross the desert toward Zaafarana on the Red Sea coast. No sooner had we turned than we noticed two things: a rising forest of electrical transmission line pylons and pipelines lined up along the edge of the road. The media has been full of development plans in recent months, so it was not difficult to identify the former as part of the project to bring new life to the Red Sea coast where foreign investment is being encouraged; and the latter as the Hurghada-Zaafarana-Koraymat fresh-water pipeline, aimed at alleviating Hurghada's perennial water shortage. On our return journey five days later, just before we reached Koraymat at sunset, we spotted what we had missed before: a vast power generator silhouetted against the red-gold sky. All along the Red Sea coast we saw workers transporting, digging and carrying out all manner of work involved in the laying down of the pipeline.

The journey to the Monastery of St Antony, 135 kilometres from Koraymat, was an easy, though not very interesting drive. We travelled along the new highway and almost missed the turnoff because, despite a neat newly-painted kiosk with a large sign saying, "Monastery of Saint Antony," we couldn't read it. It was facing east. Presumably visitor-pilgrim traffic is anticipated only from one direction.

It had been 15 years since I last saw the monastery nestled at the foot of the Galala mountain range. Anticipating the familiar sight of the keep and domes of the ancient church, I was surprised to be confronted by what seems to have become today's standard style — twin towers on each side of a modern gateway to the monastic complex.

A new wall around the expanse of land surrounding the compound is under construction. "Yes," said Father Deusoros El-Antoney who showed us around the monastery, "that is our 21st century wall, our fourth. Here we have the earliest, built in the 8th century around the old church, the 13th century wall built by monks who also painted many of the religious scenes in the old church, and the 18th century wall which was built to protect the fresh-water spring. We do not have exclusive rights to this water." He added, "Anyone who comes to the gate can have water — passing pilgrims, bedouins or their animals."

We were fortunate to be able to see the old church, as it will be closed next month for restorations which could take up to two years. It is a delightful church and Father Deusoros was happy to show us restoration trials on several of the wall paintings "to test different techniques." He pointed out some areas where the stucco had fallen off the wall, revealing earlier paintings underneath. These exquisite wall paintings, and those we later saw in the Monastery of St Paul, are among the finest examples of Coptic art in their original locations.

Although there is a rest house at the monastery, we were told that the facilities are for pilgrims only, not tourists. The former are estimated at 28,000 a year, the latter at 10,000. "At first tourists were welcome," said Father Deusoros, "but some behaved in a manner unseemly to a religious site and we decided to restrict them. An exception is made only if Papal permission is obtained."

Meanwhile, the monastery's Bishop Yostos has issued a five-point pamphlet to all visitors, requiring them to "dress decently and demurely, refrain from smoking, behave in a restrained manner and leave as soon as the guided tour is completed."

The situation at the Monastery of St Paul, situated on the other side of the Galala range and accessible from the Red Sea coastal road south of Zaafarana, is different. The monastery has separate accommodations for men and women and a large new rest house, well equipped with dining facilities and a comfortable lounge. Father Agabious, who took us on a tour of the monastery — more compact and intimate than that of St Antony — himself prepared and served a 'modest' meal: delicious *molokhia*, a large omelette and a platter of freshly-baked bread. We were the only guests.

Like the Monastery of St Antony, the wall paintings in the old church will be cleaned and restored. Also, areas of interest to visitors, such as the ancient refectory table, olive press, millstones and ancient pulleys will be turned into exhibits.

The next morning we headed south. The road to Hurghada has been resurfaced and widened. We had a pleasant surprise — one not featured in the press — when we discovered that a new ring road has been constructed to bypass Hurghada. It is 28km long and branches off the main road 22km before Hurghada. The road from which jagged mountain peaks can be seen to the west, and a hint of the Red Sea to the east, runs through a pristine desert plain to join the main road south of Hurghada city at the holiday resorts.

We continued south to Safaga where we looked for a health-curative resort. Obviously prematurely promoted in the press, we found no evidence of its existence. Active work is, however, being carried out on widening and streamlining the road connecting Safaga and Luxor. The embryonic, dual carriage way is being constructed with a narrow gully at the centre, designed to prevent vehicles from overtaking at curves in the mountain road. One lorry driver, blithely unaware of the gully's purpose happily straddled it and drove down the centre of the road, to the confusion of other drivers.

At the checkpoint 10km from Qena, we were queried as to our destination. When we told them "Luxor" we were politely asked to park in the shade. Listening to a radio dialogue between the officer on duty and his colleague in Qena, it was clear that official escorts accompany convoys of tourist buses and foreign vehicles through potentially dangerous areas. However, when we pointed out that ours was a Cairo-registered car driven by a holder of an Egyptian ID, we were permitted through.

The same care was taken on our return journey from Luxor to Cairo via Beni Suef and Assiut. Just before we branched off to take the new eastern desert road we were stopped and asked about our destination by a well-spoken officer who was obviously there to guard individual travellers. He let us through once we assured him that we would detour into the desert before reaching Assiut.

Luxor was, as always, a delight for anyone interested in following up on archaeological work in progress. There was action in the colonnade of Amenhotep III in Luxor Temple, as well as the mortuary temples on the West Bank. In the mausoleum of Ramses II's sons in the Valley of the Kings, Kent Weeks was still in action.

The only disappointment was an unsuccessful drive to the new Luxor bridge, about which we heard so much last year. We confidently expected it to be open this winter season, as announced, but there was no sign of it. The *ghaffir* (watchman) said that the approach to the West Bank was not complete, although it would, God willing, be finished next year.

Taken as a whole, the round trip revealed a positive picture. The unfinished bridge at Luxor and a lagging curative resort at Safaga were offset by impressive road links, restoration projects and improved infrastructure. Tourists may be restricted from overnight accommodation at one monastery, but facilities are available at another. More importantly, motor travel between Upper and Lower Egypt is easy and safe, along well-paved thoroughfares the entire way.

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.
Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	324836-324735
Alexandria Offices: Raml:	4833357-4820778
Gleem:	5865461-5865434
Airport Office:	4218464-4227888-4202837-4201989
Aswan Office:	315000/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	480307-480568
Assiut Office:	323151-322711-324000-329407
Mansoura Office:	363978-363733
Hurghada Office:	443591/4
Airport Office:	442883-443597
Ismailia Office:	328937-221950-221951/2-328936
Luxor Office:	380580/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	38056/7/8
Luxor Office Karnak:	382360
Marsa Matrouh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Shebin El Kom):	233302-233523-233522
New Valley Office:	088/901695
Port Said Office:	224129-222878-220921
Port Said Office Karnak:	238833-239970
Sharm El Sheikh Office:	600314-600409
Aiport Office:	600408
Taba Office:	068/530010-530011
Direct:	5783620
Tanta Office	311750/311780
Zakazik Office:	349829-349830/1

American market

THE EGYPTIAN Tourist Authority's head, Adel Abdel-Aziz and Tim Friend of the daily *USA Today* met recently to discuss means to enlarge the US to Egypt tourist market. "An advertising campaign is being carried out on CNN and a number of specialised newspapers and magazines," said Abdel-Aziz.

American tourist movement, considered one of Egypt's most important sources of tourism according to Abdel-Aziz, increased to 160,000 in 1996, an 11.5 per cent rise over 1995 figures.

Luxor marathon

THE FOURTH International Luxor Marathon is scheduled to take place in February with 500 Egyptian's among the 1300 runners participating. Starting from Hatshepsut Temple on the Theban necropolis, the marathon's course will pass a number of ancient sites over its 42kms distance.

Spanish supplement

THE SPANISH Egyptologist and travel writer Terence Maix is hard at work preparing a tourist supplement on Egypt for the daily *ABC* magazine. Research for the supplement, which will highlight Egypt's ancient sites and tourist attractions, took the writer on visits to Cairo, Alexandria, and Luxor. Maix is also preparing *The Literature of Emotions of Ancient Egyptians*, the latest in a series of books including *The Nile Corniche*, *Cleopatra's Dreams* and *Nefertiti*.

French promotion

THE FRENCH publication *Le Figaro*, distributed throughout France, Belgium and Switzerland, is set to publish a series of articles and photos about Egypt and its tourist resorts in its January edition. "The tourist movement from France increased by 109 per cent in the period from January to October 1996 compared to the same period in 1995," said Adel Abdel-Aziz, the head of ETA."

African Trader

JOHN Edwards, editor-in-chief of the *African Trader* magazine recently met the president of the ETA to discuss increased cooperation between the two countries. Relations have flourished since the visit of the Egyptian Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui to South Africa.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

How old is the treasure?

A new method promises to date ancient artefacts more precisely, **Sherine Nasr** reports

Knowing the age of an object is a vital clue to the culture that produced it. Therefore, new dating techniques for the study of ancient Egyptian metals and building materials are of special interest. The Cairo-based French Institute for Oriental Studies has established a project aimed at setting a standard for the dating of ancient materials in laboratories. "A unified measurement technique through using a modern material is now available to local as well as international laboratories," said Michael Wootman, director of the project.

Wootman noted that in the past each laboratory had its own measurement technique. Therefore, there were some differences in determining the age of metal objects and building materials. The new technique will provide laboratories with reference materials to calibrate their measurement devices.

This new reference device, submitted by the Joint Research Centre of the European Community will enable, among other things, a deeper study of the history of commercial exchange in Ancient Egypt. The merit of this new method is not only that it ensures maximum accuracy but also that it does not inflict damage, or at least very little damage, on the object studied. The earlier Carbon-14 test had the disadvantage of requiring a fairly large sample for testing. "This test can be successfully carried out with a mere milligram of the object," Wootman said.

In Egypt, the team started by studying and cataloguing artifacts, tools and building materials of different periods throughout pharaonic history. This applied to everyday agricultural tools, as well as more precious burial objects.

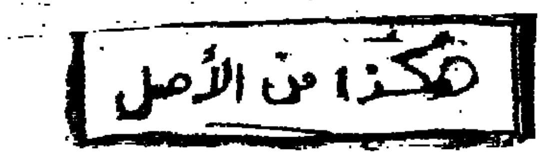
"We can trace the rapid development in the use of natural copper in the Old Kingdom at about 2500 BC," he said, adding that the introduction of alloys was "somewhat late". Making copper alloys appeared first in Palestine, Anatolia and Mesopotamia, while "the technique was not introduced to Egypt until 2300 BC." Wootman explained that the conversion of minerals into metals requires a chemical reaction that is rather complicated to induce. "They smelted metals and cast them into objects but these metals were not local."

Bronze — a mixture of copper and tin — came to Egypt 500 years after other civilisations started to manufacture it. Bronze objects were made in Egypt, but the material was imported from Cyprus. Moreover, the everyday use of iron was also late in coming to Egypt. "Except for an iron dagger that was among Tutankhamun's collection, and which must have been imported from somewhere else, the common use of iron was only introduced to Egypt in 600 BC, although it was commonly used almost 400 years earlier in other places," explained Wootman. On the other hand, natural metals such as gold were used in Egypt early on. Almost all of the country's present 100 mines of gold were discovered and first exploited by Ancient Egyptians.

In building materials, the composition of the mortar used by Ancient Egyptians remained the same until the Roman period. "They always used gypsum mortar, as opposed to lime, which was used by the surrounding civilisations as early as the 3rd century BC," Wootman said.

The new measurement reference technique will enable the study of commercial exchange in ancient times. "In order to develop a theory about this, we first need to know what material they exchanged, from where it came and when," Wootman said. Ancient artifacts and the development of their manufacturing techniques will also be part of the study. Some of the history of commercial exchange in the region is recorded on the walls of temples, but Wootman believes that they should be carefully interpreted. "We have to be critical about texts which sometimes echo mere propaganda directed by the king himself."

The project will enhance the general guidelines for good analytical practices and will increase the data base on ancient metal objects and building materials in Egypt.



هكذا من الأصل



A snapshot from an international encounter between Egypt and Sweden

photos: Salah Ibrahim

Old year and new

The Egyptian National Handball team stood on the winner's podium at both the Italian and the Swedish Championships. **Inas Mazhar** reports

The Egyptian national team didn't allow a little thing like fun prevent them from sacrificing New Year's celebrations at home as they headed off to Italy to compete in the Italian Handball Championship. The tournament held from 27 to 29 December had four teams competing.

The Egyptian team clinched the title after powering their way through three victories. They sent Turkey packing with a decisive 31/19 defeat before besting Italy 21/17 and ended by conquering Greece 31/28. Egypt's triumph didn't end with the taking of the tournament trophy. Superstar Gohar Nabil was selected best player and Ayman Salah was named best goalkeeper.

The team barely rested before embarking for Sweden to participate in the Four-Nations Championship, which included Denmark, Greece, Egypt and Sweden. The national team, taking on a bit of the Scandinavian cool, beat Greece 30/18 for the second time in a week in their rematch.

The second match of the tournament took on elements of the surreal as the Egyptian team's players appeared to be out of sorts and lost the game 24/26. "The players seemed to be losing control of the ball. We couldn't believe our eyes," said Khaled Mourtagey, administrative team manager, "The team lost at least 15 chances to score. The ball either went past or above the net."

There was palpable state of anxiety as the final and decisive match against Sweden approached. The athletes found themselves playing in front of a rabid crowd of 10,000 home fans who assembled to cheer on the Atlanta Olympic's silver medalists Swedish team. The spectators, however, didn't allow chauvinism to prevent them from warmly applauding the Egyptians as well.

Egypt wasted no time establishing the lead early on in the match. "We were leading throughout the match with four-goal differences," commented Mourtagey, "But the Swedes did their best to inhibit our momentum and they actually succeeded in narrowing the goal difference down to one goal in the last ten minutes. Fortunately they couldn't drive the match to a draw and we won 24/23."

Mourtagey confirmed that the team's players had received offers to turn pro among different Italian and Swedish teams. "We were very frank about the matter of professionalism and we made it clear to them that the Egyptian Federation will allow its players to turn pro after the end of the World Championship in Japan, and not before," Mourtagey said.

The federation has planned an intensive schedule for the team as it prepares for the upcoming World Championship. The squad is to play international matches against Iceland and Norway from 25 February to 3 March before participating in Al-Ahram's 2nd International Handball Championship in April followed by matches in Croatia, France and Japan.

Mourtagey mentioned that the federation is studying the feasibility of holding an Arab competition for the four teams participating in the World Cup finals; Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. "We haven't set a date yet," said Mourtagey, "We are studying the idea, and then we'll determine whether to hold it or not after negotiating it with the other nations."

Flu rest for the rest

CHINESE flu's most common sign of visitation is to leave the afflicted bedridden. But not so for Brian Robson, the English soccer coach of Middlesborough. Robson, whose 23-member team has been wiped out by the bug and various other illnesses, has announced that he will return to play despite his 40-odd years.

The former footballer, who retired from professional play two years ago, had been at a loss for options until the proverbial light bulb came on.

On course

THE GOVERNORATE of Luxor is to get a new golf course built to the latest specifications. Maj. Gen. Mohamed Youssef, Luxor governor, has announced that a golf course will be built in 1997 to enable the city to host a world championship in the future. He added that the course will add to the region's allure as a tourist attraction.

Moving on up

THERE was good news in the last qualification of the International Organisation for Squash Professionals as Ahmed Barada rose to seventh in the world. It's been 15 years since Magdi Saad, the only other Egyptian to reach that level, held the same rank.

Barada will attempt to better his ranking by participating in the French Squash Championship in February and the Squash Masters Championship between the world's top eight players.

Dry docked

THE EGYPTIAN Swimming Federation's financial difficulties have left the national team out of the water. The federation's dire straits have forced a realisation that it can no longer afford to pay the LE480,000 bill for the use of the Cairo Stadium swimming pool for training the national players.

Worse still there is no money for the players to participate in international competitions.

Fare thee well

TUNISIAN fans are in mourning following the death by heart failure of football champion Hady ben Rekhissa. The footballer collapsed shortly after the Saturday evening match between his team, Esperance Tunis and Olympique Lyonnais at Tunis' Zeitouna Stadium. According to AP, efforts to revive him at the stadium failed and the star was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital.

The unmarried 26-year-old was the 1995 Arab football player of the year and had led the Tunisian team to numerous national, Arab and African title wins in his illustrious career.

Horses of course

THE 7th Mövenpick International Equestrian Championship is currently underway in the hotel's back garden. Forty riders, including Germany's Atlanta Olympic double gold winner Ulrich Kirchoff and Fredric Cottler from France, and eighty horses from the five continents are participating in the 4-day event.

Football news

THE EGYPTIAN national football team easily defeated the Belarus national team before a modest turnout of 5,000 spectators in Alexandria. The friendly encounter was a dress rehearsal for Egypt's upcoming 12 January match against Tunisia for the 1998 World Cup qualifications in Tunis.

Sherno Alexander, the Belarussian coach, has requested an extension of his team's visit to enable it to play another Egyptian team before returning to Europe.

In other football news, the Egyptian under-19 national team achieved a scoreless draw against Zimbabwe in the second-leg of the qualifications for the African Nations Cup to be held in Morocco next May.

Challenging the odds

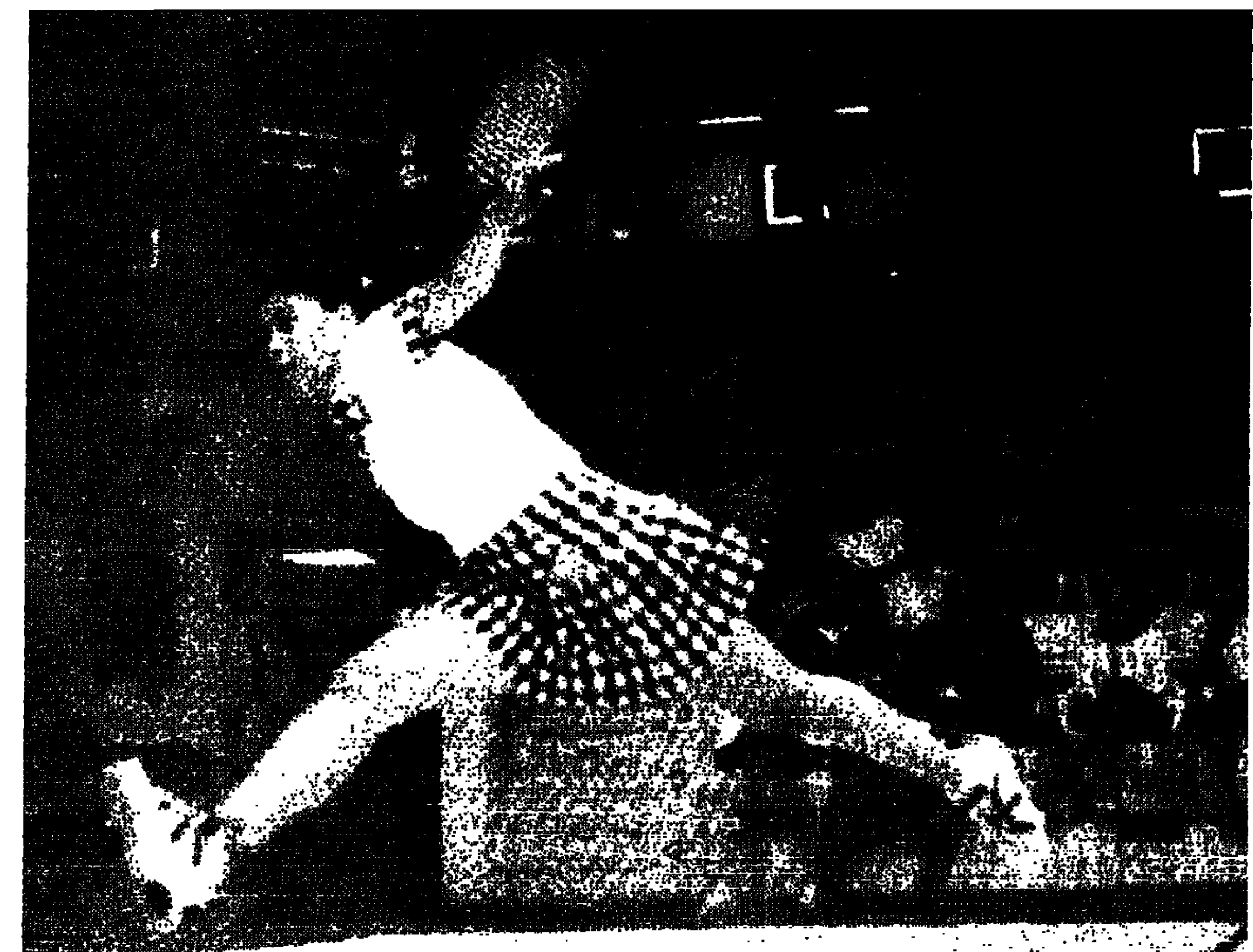
Salma Shabana, Egypt's top female squash player, is one of the nation's only female athletes who have almost made it to the top internationally. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** finds out how

For reasons of tradition, Egypt like most Islamic and other Third World countries, is reticent when it comes to women's participation in sports, particularly on the international level. Salma Shabana, Egypt's squash champion and world-ranked 20, however, had the perseverance and determination to attain a world-rank never before achieved by a female Egyptian squash player.

The daughter of veteran squash player Mustafa Shabana, Salma started playing squash at the age of eight in Kuwait, where she trained with Egyptian and Pakistani coaches. Although she never had the opportunity to play professionally, Salma played with classmates of various nationalities who took the sport seriously. Coming to Egypt at the age of 15, she quickly proved her talent by winning all of her matches and becoming the nation's squash champion.

The Federation invited her to participate in the British Juniors Squash Championship — the second toughest competition in the world. Again Salma won most of her matches. Egyptian Abbass Kaoud, a London resident and coach, saw a promising player in her and advised her father to send her to more international competitions.

At that time she came up against the lack of funding provided by the Federation, a quandary she shared with many of her team-mates. At this stage, she might simply have given up squash and turned to other less demanding pursuits. Being the serious and ambitious person she was, however, with her father's encouragement and financial backing, Salma began competing abroad while she searched for a suitable sponsor.



Salma Shabana in the Heliopolis Open

Shabana's turning point came when she won third place at the July 1995 Junior World Championship in Sydney, Australia. Participating every year in the British Open, she worked her way up the Professional Squash Association (PSA) until she was ranked 28th in the world. Unfortunately, she faced a slight set back when she — juggling squash and her studies — took time to concentrate on earning the necessary grades to enter university. As a result, her world-rank dropped to 33rd.

She missed many international competitions so when she came back to the circuit, it took her some time to get back on her feet and start winning matches again. "Salma is very sensitive, and it wasn't easy for her to accept defeat from people she had beat before," said her father.

However, as soon as Salma won the European Grand Prix twice, she quickly regained her resilience.

At the 1996 Women's World Championships in Malaysia, Salma, heading the Egyptian team, hoped to return home with third place. Failing to accomplish that did not shatter her dreams however, for she managed to make it to the quarter-finals. The competitions she has participated in since then have enabled her to improve her rank. She now ranks 20th in the world.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Never enough

Ahli women's team was Egypt's sole representative in the 8th African Clubs Women's Volleyball Championship which took place in Algeria from 30 December - 4 January. **Abeer Anwar** reports

There were some new Egyptian faces in Algeria as Ahli Club's women's volleyball team faced the competition in the 8th African Clubs Women's Volleyball Championship. Team coach Raouf Abdel-Qader, in order to inject new blood and enliven team spirit, made a number of last minute changes to the line-up shortly before the team's departure from the Olympic Centre in Maadi. The women, indeed, were ablaze with the hope of holding onto the trophy for the second consecutive year. But, as they found, hope alone is just never enough. They rocketed through their first three matches before running out of fuel at the end of the 5-day event. The 30 December - 4 January tournament was attended by six club teams: Egypt's Ahli, Fergani and Helal from Tunisia, Begaia and Molidia from Algeria and Cameroon's Sonal.

Ahli was pitted against late arrivals Sonal of Cameroon in their first match which they won 3/1 with a score of 15-13, 15-13, 7-15 and 15-9 in the make-up game.

The squad next dusted Tunisia's Helal after a Herculean two-hour match which featured two professional Russian players on the Tunisian side. The team's main play maker, Mona Abdel-Kerim's ill health just prior to the match provided substitute Nesreen Lotfi with an opportunity to prove her mettle among the giants. "It was the best match I have ever played in my life," noted Lotfi, "I felt that I had to do my best for my team and my country."

In their third encounter, Ahli bested Algeria's Molidia 3-0 with a score of 15-8, 15-10 and 15-4 as Egypt's Tahani Tosoon put her stamp on the match. Tosoon, voted best African Volleyball player for a number of years, was by all accounts the player to watch during the championship.

Ahli found themselves fagged out by the time of their last match and as a result their prospects of retaining the title are on the wane. Algeria's Begaia handed Ahli a 2/3 defeat in a match which at 3 hours was the longest of the tournament. Despite their loss, Ahli's aggregate score equalled the home team in points requiring the referees to resort to counting the score of the matches' sets. This made the difference and Begaia team was named winner ahead of Ahli in second and Tunisia's Helal third.

Al-Ahram Weekly

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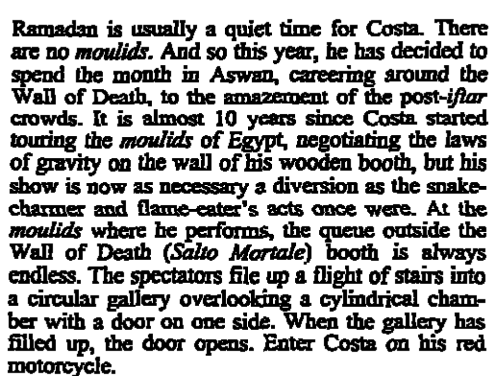


photo: Jihan Ammar

photo: Sherif Sonbol

Kostandinos Nikolaidis: Nomad on the wall

The Wall of Death won't be coming soon to a cinema near you



Ramadan is usually a quiet time for Costa. There are no *moulids*. And so this year, he has decided to spend the month in Aswan, careering around the Wall of Death, to the amazement of the post-*iftar* crowds. It is almost 10 years since Costa started touring the *moulids* of Egypt, negotiating the laws of gravity on the wall of his wooden booth, but his show is now as necessary a diversion as the snake-charmer and flame-eater's acts once were. At the *moulids* where he performs, the queue outside the Wall of Death (*Salto Mortale*) booth is always endless. The spectators file up a flight of stairs into a circular gallery overlooking a cylindrical chamber with a door on one side. When the gallery has filled up, the door opens. Enter Costa on his red motorcycle.

He turns a few unhurried circles, starts gathering speed, then swerves onto the wall of the cylinder, driving horizontally. A collective catching of breath and the faint-hearted wince and look away, braving a glance down the cylinder every now and then. Meanwhile, Costa bides his time, driving all the way up to the rim of the cylinder — inches away from the spectators — and down the wall. The choreography becomes more complicated. Nonchalantly, he crosses a leg, riding side saddle. When the applause intensifies, he lets go of the handle bars and, still sitting sideways, sociably joins in with the clapping. And all the while he is gathering speed, closer to the top of the wooden barrel, riding all the way up and, keeping his feet on the pedals, standing at a right angle to his audience, waving all the time. Then comes the *pièce de résistance*: driving down, down to the bottom of the barrel, he grabs a piece of cloth his assistant flings towards him and spreads it over his eyes. With the flags of Egypt and Greece covering his face, he drives up again, and lets go of the handle bars to clap along with the frenzied applause.

Costa first started performing the Wall of Death act at the age of 17. Contrary to what one may expect, he is not an Egyptian Greek. Costa was born in 1940, in Thessaloniki, Greece. No one in his family had any connections with the world of entertainment. Costa learned the trade from a friend, Prodromos, himself tutored by an uncle who had been performing since 1933. From their base in Thessaloniki, Costa and Prodromos would tour Greece, performing at saints' festivals, country fairs and fun fairs, where they would ride the wall together. But the team split up because, according to Costa, "Prodromos put on a lot of weight, he became a liability. I wasn't going to take responsibility for him." Making Cyprus his base for a few years, Costa also performed for brief spells in Germany, Italy, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. How was it then that he decided to move to Egypt?

"The fate of each is written on his forehead," Costa offers. When that doesn't go down well, he says that a Cypriot colleague talked him into moving here with the persuasive argument that "there are sixty million people in Egypt". In October 1987, Costa and his booth boarded a ship in Limassol and headed for Egypt. He hasn't looked back since. Egypt suits him perfectly, he says. There are *moulids* almost all year round and the audiences, he maintains, are more responsive than in Greece. He says Egyptians are very hospitable to strangers, and he feels good around womanly women and manly men... "you don't get them much in Europe these days". That said, he adds that until he learnt to speak Arabic well, he was losing money. His Arabic is of the racy variety where women are not *sittat*, but *niswan* (roughly, dames or broads) and an illiterate person is referred to as a *basmagi* (a person who cannot sign documents but "stamps" them with a fingerprint instead).

It's taken him a while to get the feel of different *moulids* and work out a convenient, lucrative itinerary. The capital is out: he performed twice at the *moulids* of Al-Hussein and Sayyeda Zeinab, but found he couldn't take the types who hang around there and harass women: "*baltagiya*" — thugs. He favours rural areas, where his audience is composed of "*fellahin* — good people" and "Upper Egyptians — real men". Essential stops on his calendar include the *moulids* of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi in Tanta, Sidi Ibrahim Al-Dessouki in Dessouk, and Al-'Adra (The Virgin) in Assiut. In dry *moulid* spells, he performs at a fun fair in Roxy and might negotiate the odd three-week contract in a Gulf state.

For such a nomad, Costa is strict about the decorum and rituals of his metier. His six-strong team — four of whom are Upper Egyptians, he interjects — precede him to the *moulid* and set up the booth. Arriving at the town or village, Costa goes on a round of courtesy calls to other performers — the Ferris wheel people, the clown and so on. Then he tests his motorcycle and checks the cylinder before the performance starts. And what does it take — apart from centrifugal force — to perform the Wall of Death act? "You make sure there's no dizziness", he explains, "and of course, you need a lion's heart. Before you get on the motorcycle, you cross yourself — in other words, you say '*Allahu Akbar*'".

And he will let you know he's the subject of seduction attempts and match-making schemes, but he puts it so matter-of-factly you don't think: "Ah, the male peacock act", but find yourself musing that it's probably one of the hazards of the job. It stands to reason: he's a knight on a motor steed, his armour a black suit embossed with a golden "K", braving death on average fifty times a night, thirty *moulids* a year. On his part, he's not averse to the amorous side of things — oh no, far from it. It's that "the older you get the pickier you become — not just any woman will do". Costa was married once, but is now divorced. Sensing an unasked question, he says: "My ex-wife is from Crete." He pauses. "Cretan women are very beautiful women." Pause. "And like all beautiful women, they are difficult."

Egypt has had a very sobering effect on him, he claims, hence his good relations with the police. "And why should I have problems with the police? I don't drink, don't do drugs; the only thing I do is the *shisha*." And he does do the *shisha* with gusto. It's the plain honey-flavoured tobacco he prefers — no apple or apricot flavours — and preferably with a cup of Turkish coffee. In the pristine, sparsely furnished apartment he rents in Helwan, the *shisha* dominates the living room. The only other luxury is a remote-controlled colour TV set. There is a marked absence of things Greek. In the dining room, above the sideboard, is what looks like an icon. But it turns out to be a framed printed reproduction of an icon of Anba Abram in Fayoum, at the monastery which Costa loves to visit. Otherwise, there are very few personal possessions and the occupant is obviously someone who has learnt to travel light.

Over the years, Costa seems to have been involved in a process of paring down, be it of possessions, relationships or the numbers in his Wall of Death act. That he's among the last riders of the Wall of Death, if not the last, sinks in gradually, perhaps because he, apparently, does not regard himself as "the last of a breed" or any such romantic tosh. He knows the fact of course, but it translates into other calculations. Ask him how many people perform the Wall of Death act in Greece and he'll tell you that, of the 10 people who used to ride the wall, he's the only one left. He will mumble something about some having died on the job. He will also tell you that the last Italian performer died six years ago. And of course, there's no insurance for the kind of work he does, no trade unions, no pension.

But Costa has evolved a code for minimising damage. "One particular year, 1964 or '65, I went to hospital four times — a broken leg here, a broken arm there...". He says he's now cut out the more dangerous numbers from his performance: "Why risk your life for a one-pound ticket?" Though he may not admit it, he is probably also aware that this form of entertainment has gone out in Europe and in many big urban centres the world round. The closest thing to Wall of Death performers are the kids on their gravity-defying roller-blades and skate-boards. The on-line, theme park-going generation would probably find the Wall of Death performance at best quaint. Hence, perhaps, the southward trend of his ever-changing itinerary: from Europe to Egypt, and within Egypt, from big city to small town and village.

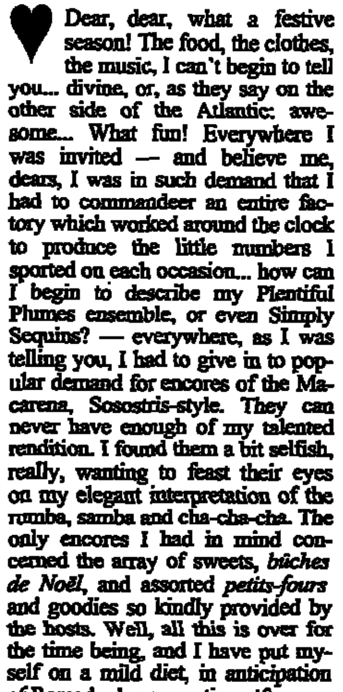
But Costa puts a brave face on things: he casually explains his preference for festivals in villages in terms of audiences being less blasé in places where there is not a single cinema and the *moulid* brings a year's stock of entertainment. He also says he may tutor Hussein, one of his helpers in the Wall of Death act. He is particularly fond of Hussein — "he's a solid type, and he's not a *basmagi*."

While performing in Aswan, what will he do for his own entertainment on the occasional night off? He says he may nip over to Luxor which he likes much better now than when he first saw it seven years ago: "The city council's doing a great job, it has to be said... you no longer find donkeys and cows roaming through the streets." Meanwhile, he's courteous, punctual, has no debts, leaves no loose strings anywhere. He's his own man, doing his own thing — spinning dazzling circles on the wall of life.

Profile by ***Hala Halim***

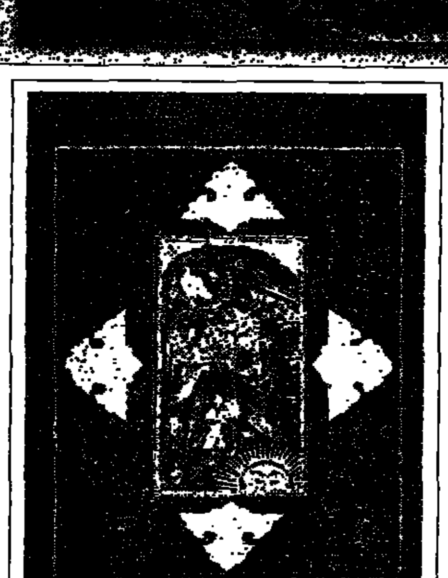
Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris











Top (l-r): Maged Farag's eleventh commandment: "Thou Shalt Never Stop Dreaming"; Shell's *Takween* by Bikar; Tarek Heggy's *zaffa* on a camel by Ragheb Ayyad

Bottom (l-r): Greetings from the Courrier International, UNICEF; the Press Service of the French Embassy

♥ Dear, dear, what a festive season! The food, the clothes, the music, I can't begin to tell you... divine, or, as they say on the other side of the Atlantic: awesome... What fun! Everywhere I was invited — and believe me, dears, I was in such demand that I had to commandeer an entire factory which worked around the clock to produce the little numbers I sported on each occasion... how can I begin to describe my Plentiful Plumes ensemble, or even Simply Sequins? — everywhere, as I was telling you, I had to give in to popular demand for encores of the Macarena, Sosostris-style. They can never have enough of my talented rendition. I found them a bit selfish, really, wanting to feast their eyes on my elegant interpretation of the rumba, samba and cha-cha-cha. The only encores I had in mind concerned the array of sweets, *bûches de Noël*, and assorted *petits-fours* and goodies so kindly provided by the hosts. Well, all this is over for the time being, and I have put myself on a mild diet, in anticipation of Ramadan's scrumptious *iftars*.

To sustain me in my hour of need, however, I have the greeting cards sent to me by my trillions of admirers and I have decided to share the most creative with you. One of my favourites is **Tarek Heggy**'s, which features a *zaffa* on a camel, a reproduction of an oil painting by famous Egyptian artist **Ragheb Ayyad**. The original painting graces Tarek's private collection, and what a generous gesture to think of sharing it with me. **Tarek** started the tradition of sharing his personal collection of masterpieces with his friends when he was chairman of Shell, Egypt, and the new chairman **Roger Patey** has carried on the tradition. His greetings were adorned with a painting entitled *Takween* by famous Egyptian contemporary artist **Hussein Bikar**. A lot of food for thought, as you can see, but none of those delicious chocolate tidbits my thoughtful fans used to send me.

Anyway, dears, let it be known that **Tarek** and **Roger** are not really pioneers. The idea was originally the brainchild of yours truly, when I reproduced my own original Boticelli, *La Primavera*, on my Christmas cards. I was quite pleased with their daintiness until a friend pointed out that the only place I could realistically send them from was Australia. I argued quite persuasively in favour of reminding snow-bound friends that spring was not an impossible dream, but to no avail. I looked in the catalogue of my private gallery but could not locate a Boticelli entitled *L'Inverno*. Maybe he never painted it after all, an oversight I will have to think of repairing when I have the time.

Not everyone is into disseminating art, though. My good friend **Maged Farag**, famous for the elegance of the luxurious royal albums he has published, refused to draw on his collection of royal memorabilia to wish us a happy new year. Rather, Maged, most noted for his retiring, self-effacing nature, decided to send his friends a simple picture of himself as he would like us to think of him. I always found Maged's modesty so endearing. Unlike me, however, he does not take his dreams of grandeur seriously.

Another eye-catching creation is the one I received from **Courrier International**, simply announcing *On déménage* ("We're moving"). Being familiar with French slang (or *argot* as we Parisians call it) — among many other things — I assumed at first that they were referring to my unstable state of mind. I was about to send them one of my witty repartees — for which I am famous, as you well know — when, on closer examination, I discovered that they were simply moving to a new address. They had me worried for a while. But they know better than to take such liberties with me. Happy packing, **Courrier**!

The Press Service of the **French Embassy**, on the other hand, is not going anywhere. The staff have their hands full as it is, what with the numerous cups of *mazbout* they sip continuously and the international publications they peruse so assiduously. Their charming card may illustrate the way they perceive their audience, but then again, it may just be a reference to their everyday activities. Why, I do the same thing every day in my own living-room to find out who has reported on my comings and goings. Come to think of it, I am well equipped to start a Press Service myself.

UNICEF, conscious of the heavy burden of looking after the children of the world, have chosen to convey their greetings in a much more serious way. Their good wishes are exquisitely complemented by the reproduction of an anonymous Persian miniature, from the Safavid period, entitled *Mi'raj: The Prophet's Ascension*, courtesy of Le Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva. A real beauty! I have a good mind to fly there on the weekend just to take a look at the original. It would match my newly upholstered settee divinely, if you'll pardon the pun. Well, as I was saying, I did think of Boticelli...

هكذا من الأصل